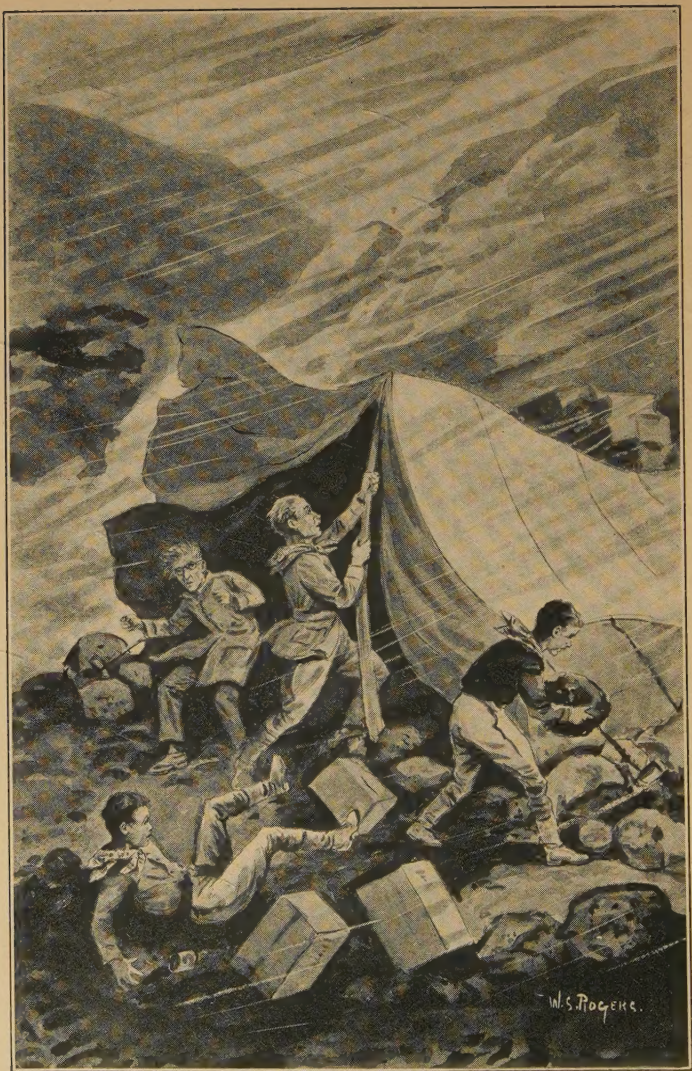


~~Wid Rowland~~

Charles Duke



DESPERATELY THEY FOUGHT THE GALE, TRYING TO SAVE
THE TENT.

Don Sturdy in the Land of Volcanoes.

Frontispiece—(Page 159)

DON STURDY IN THE LAND OF VOLCANOES

OR

The Trail of the Ten Thousand Smokes

BY

VICTOR APPLETON

AUTHOR OF "DON STURDY ON THE DESERT OF MYSTERY," "DON
STURDY ACROSS THE NORTH POLE," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS
WIRELESS MESSAGE," "TOM SWIFT AND HIS CHEST OF
SECRETS," ETC.

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BOOKS FOR BOYS

By VICTOR APPLETON

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THE DON STURDY SERIES

DON STURDY ON THE DESERT OF MYSTERY
DON STURDY WITH THE BIG SNAKE HUNTERS
DON STURDY IN THE TOMBS OF GOLD
DON STURDY ACROSS THE NORTH POLE
DON STURDY IN THE LAND OF VOLCANOES

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TOM SWIFT AND HIS GREAT OIL GUSHER
TOM SWIFT AND HIS CHEST OF SECRETS

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Don Sturdy in the Land of Volcanoes

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DON STURDY IN THE LAND OF VOLCANOES

CHAPTER I

A SUDDEN INTERRUPTION

“Don, how would you like to visit the land of volcanoes? To go to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes?” asked Captain Frank Sturdy, Don’s uncle, as he turned from a paper that he had been reading with absorbed interest.

Don Sturdy, a clean-featured, robust lad of fifteen, looked up quickly from his work of oiling a rifle. “Hits me just where I live,” he replied. “Travel, you know, is my middle name, especially if there’s lots of adventure mixed up with it. But just what land do you mean? There are so many countries that have volcanoes; Italy, Mexico, South America—”

“None of those,” interrupted his uncle. “You wouldn’t have to go out of Uncle Sam’s territory.”

Don looked a little puzzled.

“That’s a new one to me,” he replied. “I

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didn't know that we had any live volcanoes in the United States except Mount Lassen in California, and that only wakes up for an hour or two every once in a while."

"That's right enough as far as what we usually call the United States is concerned," agreed Captain Sturdy. "But what I have in my mind just now is Alaska, our biggest outlying possession."

"Alaska!" exclaimed Don with quickened interest. "Why, it isn't so long since we were there on our trip to the North Pole. We didn't see any trace of volcanoes then that I remember. Besides, that's a mighty cold country, and I always have had the idea that volcanoes were most common in hot climates."

"So they are as a general thing," acceded his uncle. "But this is one of the exceptions that proves the rule. The reason we didn't see anything of them on our polar trip was that we didn't pass over that part of the territory. But they're there, all right enough. You don't remember, for you were only a baby at the time, but one of the greatest eruptions of modern times took place in 1912 when Mount Katmai blew the top of its head off."

"Sort of committed suicide, so to speak," remarked Don, with a grin. "I hope it didn't blow any one else's head off at the same time."

"If it didn't," replied his uncle, "it was only

because there were no human beings in the vicinity at the time. But it made a crater eight miles in circumference and thirty-seven hundred feet deep. If it had occurred in New York City, it would have wiped out every one of its seven million people, would have turned Pittsburgh into a desert and made its influence felt as far as Denver. As it was, it sent up so much dust that it interfered with the sun's heat and made the summer of that year ten degrees cooler than usual. So it wasn't such a local thing after all."

"I should say not!" exclaimed Don. "It must have been a lallapaloozer. I should think that what people there were up there would have thought the end of the world had come."

"I guess a good many of them did," was the reply. "Why, at the nearest settlement, a hundred miles away, the ashfall was so thick that a lighted lantern held at arm's length could not be seen through the curtain of dust."

"Gee!" exclaimed Don. "They must have eaten their peck of dirt right then and there," he added, with a laugh. "But what has the explosion of the mountain got to do with the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes?"

"I was coming to that. The first party of white men to go there after the eruption only went to study the effects of that. But when they once got there, they went a little further and

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suddenly came in sight of a valley where tens of thousands of wisps of smoke or vapor were curling up into the air, some of them mere shreds and some the size of a waterspout or larger."

"It must have been a wonderful sight!" ejaculated Don, who by this time was listening with such breathless interest that he had forgotten his task of oiling the rifle. "Where did the smokes come from?"

"That was what the explorers asked themselves," replied his uncle. "And they found the answer when they got down to the floor of the valley and found it studded with holes and seamed with fissures through which the steam was coming up. They found these so hot in some cases that they could light a piece of paper by holding it over the holes. In other words, they kindled a fire with water."

"Oh, come, Uncle Frank!" protested Don. "Aren't you getting me on a string with such a yarn?"

"Not at all," replied the captain. "These men were eminent scientists, and what they tell us isn't to be put in the usual list of travelers' tales. There were other wonders there that I couldn't begin to tell you the tenth of. But what I want to know just now is the answer to the question I started with. Would you really like to go there?"

“Would I?” repeated Don enthusiastically. “Just lead me to it! That is, of course,” he added, as a thought struck him, “if mother and father are willing.”

“Of course,” agreed the captain. “But I don’t think there will be much difficulty about that. The way you showed you could take care of yourself on this last trip to the North Pole will probably sweep away any objections they might have. I’ll talk to Richard about it as soon as I get a chance.”

“What put the idea into your head?” asked Don. “Also, how and when are you planning to go?”

“I’ve been mulling the plan over in my head off and on for some time,” was the reply. “There’s a rare species of bear up in that part of Alaska, the kodiak bear they call it, that’s about the biggest and fiercest bear alive, and one of the zoölogical companies has been after me to get some specimens. And by a coincidence, your Uncle Amos has had his thoughts turned in the same direction, for he wants to get specimens of the volcanic ash and the minerals of that region for one of his scientific societies. So I thought that he and I might go together, and as you’ve been with us on all our recent expeditions, it struck me that you might care to go along.”

“You bet I would!” responded Don. “But,

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Uncle Frank," he added, rather hesitatingly, "couldn't we make it a foursome while we're about it?"

The captain grinned.

"I suppose you mean couldn't we take that young scapegrace, Teddy Allison, along," he said.

"Just that," admitted Don. "I missed him dreadfully on that trip to the North Pole. And Teddy himself was fairly sick because he couldn't go along. Teddy's a bully pal, and you know yourself, Uncle Frank, that you're almost as fond of him as I am."

"Teddy's a good scout, all right," admitted Don's uncle, "and I don't see why he shouldn't go along if his father is willing. I'll leave it to you to call him up and talk to him about it. But we'll have to do a little hustling. There's a scientific expedition leaving for Alaska in a couple of weeks, and as I know some of the members I don't think there will be any difficulty in our going along with them. Of course, we'll be a separate party, but we can travel with them until they get to Alaska and pick up a lot of information that will come in good later on. Then, when we actually reach the territory, they'll go their way and we'll go ours—for the time being, at least."

He looked at his watch and rose from his seat.

"I have an engagement now," he said, as he

gathered the papers from his desk and slipped them into one of the drawers, "but we'll go into the matter further after supper."

As he left the room he caught sight of a feminine figure vanishing down the corridor which he recognized as that of Jenny Jenks, the maid of all work of the Sturdy household.

Jenny burst into the kitchen, all agog with the news that she had picked up while ostensibly dusting the hall.

"Well, of all the things I ever heard!" she exclaimed, as she sank into a chair, her jaws wagging vigorously as she chewed the gum that she was seldom without.

"Been listening at doors again, Jenny?" queried Mrs. Roscoe, the plump, matronly housekeeper, raising her eyebrows slightly in curiosity.

"Not at all!" declared Jenny virtuously. "But a body has ears, I hope, an' ears was given to hear with, an' I ain't the one to stuff them with no cotton wool, an' if the cap'n and Mister Don get to talkin' excited like, I can't help hearin', an' I guess there ain't no law against it an' that's one thing I'll say if it's the very last word I ever spoke, an'—"

"No danger of you ever getting to your last word, Jenny," commented Mrs. Roscoe somewhat dryly.

"An' what I say is," continued Jenny, shift-

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ing her wad of gum, "an' I'll say it till my last breath an' I don't care who hears me—what I say is that it ain't right for the cap'n, who is old enough to know better, to try to make a smoker out of Mister Don, him who I never see have even a cigarette in his mouth. Laws knows, bad habits come soon enough!"

"What in the name of goodness are you driving at?" asked Mrs. Roscoe, staring at the girl in some perplexity.

"I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't heard it with my own ears," said Jenny. "But I heard the cap'n urg'in' that poor young boy to go to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. As if ten smokes wasn't bad for a boy like that, let alone ten thousand! They must have the habit some-thin' orful up there. I heerd the cap'n say that it was so thick up there that you couldn't see a lighted lantern if you held it out at the end of your arm. An' when Mister Don comes back his health will be hurt an' he'll be scatterin' cigar ashes all over the house, and laws knows I have enough dustin' to do as it is—"

"Jenny Jenks, have you gone plumb crazy?" asked the housekeeper, in bewilderment. "I don't believe a word of it."

"Mebbe you think I ain't got ears then," declared Jenny, taking a fresh grip on her gum. "But that ain't the worst of it. There's things up there that blow the top of their heads off. I

couldn't jest ketch what it was, a mountebank or mountain lion or somethin' of that kind, it sounded like. I don't know jest how they do it, but I s'pose they jest eat dynamite and then bust up against somethin' that sets 'em off. But what I do know is that it ain't no place fur Christian people to go to. An' if Mister Don comes back without his head, like in a movie I seen once of a headless horseman an' him holdin' his head under his arm that jest give me the shivers an' I ain't a-goin' to ferget it if I live to be a hundred—"

Just then a call from Mrs. Sturdy brought Jenny from the depths of her chair to answer it, while Mrs. Roscoe went about her work with a smile in which amusement and perplexity were mingled.

Don, in the meantime, had tried to get in touch with his chum, Teddy Allison, by long-distance telephone, but learned that he was not at home. He left word for Teddy to call him up that evening, and went down to the village on an errand for his father.

His thoughts were pleasant ones as he walked along the road that led to the town. His adventurous blood had been set a-tingle by the proposition of his uncle, and already in anticipation he saw himself in the land of wonders that had been pictured to him. It was some time now since he had returned from his won-

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derful trip to the North Pole, and the longing for new thrills and new adventure was strong upon him.

And his delight in the prospective trip was doubled by the permission of the captain to have Teddy go along. Good old Teddy, the best of pals, who had stood so bravely beside him in the Desert of Sahara and the tombs of Egypt! Don could scarcely wait to break the news to him.

As Don neared the town he caught sight of a shining new automobile drawn up by the roadside under some trees. By its sporty lines he recognized it as belonging to Brock Harrington, a youth considerably older than Don, whose father, Dwight Harrington, was one of the rich men of Hillville, having moved there from San Francisco several years before.

Standing by the car was Brock himself in animated conversation with a young girl whose back was toward Don, so that he did not recognize her.

Brock seemed to be urging something very earnestly, to which the girl would not assent. Indeed, she seemed to be half frightened, and as she heard Don's approaching footsteps she looked around as though for help.

Don's heart quickened when he saw that she was Emily Turner, a girl whom he had once saved from drowning, the close friend of his

sister Ruth and the sister of Fred Turner, one of his chums.

Brock Harrington was so engrossed that he did not notice Don's approach, and just as the latter was a few feet away Brock took Emily by the elbow and tried, none too gently, to force her into the car.

With a bound Don was at his side and grabbed the young man by the arm.

CHAPTER II

AT WHITE HEAT

BROCK HARRINGTON whirled around with a snarl to see who had grasped him so abruptly. A venomous look came into his eyes as they lighted on Don.

"What do you mean by that, Don Sturdy?" he vociferated, glaring at Don.

"What do you mean by trying to force Emily Turner into your car?" retorted Don, as he put the girl behind him.

"Oh, Don," broke in Emily, almost on the verge of tears, "I'm so glad that you came along just when you did! I was getting terribly frightened."

"Did this fellow say anything insulting to you?" asked Don, a steely look coming into his eyes.

"N-no," faltered Emily. "But he kept insisting that I should go for a ride with him, and I didn't want to. I told him so, but he kept on urging me, and then he said he was going to take me along anyway. Oh, I'm so glad you came!"

"The gallant knight rescuing a maiden in distress, is it?" sneered Brock, a big hulking fellow of eighteen with pale blue eyes set in a weak and dissipated looking face.

Don stepped up to him quickly and before his blazing eyes Brock shrank back a pace or two.

"That will be about all from you, Brock Harrington," snapped Don. "If you know what's best for you, you'll step right into that car and get along while the getting's good."

"Since when did you get a license to tell me what to do?" asked Brock belligerently.

"My license is right here," said Don, holding up his clenched fist. "If you want me to, I'll show you that it's a perfectly good one."

If Brock had any curiosity on that score, he promptly repressed it. There was something in Don's eyes that made him feel that it would be a good thing to heed his warning.

"Well, I'm going anyway," he growled, and he climbed into the car. "But don't think for a minute that it's because you tell me to. And let me tell you this, Mr. Buttinski: I'll get even with you yet just as sure as my name's Brock Harrington."

Don smiled contemptuously and Brock drove off with a vicious spurt of speed, pausing just once when at a safe distance to lean out and shake his fist at his adversary.

Don turned to Emily, who by this time had

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regained her composure. She was a pretty girl and her eyes were still brighter from the tears that lingered in them.

She and her brother Fred were orphans who lived with a maiden aunt a short distance out of the village. Don had made their acquaintance on a day when Emily had fallen into a creek that heavy rains had transformed into a raging torrent and Don had rescued her at the risk of his own life. He had been of great help also in restoring Emily's brother Fred, who was a cripple, to perfect health. Emily had become a close friend of Don's sister Ruth, and a strong tie of affection united the Sturdy and the Turner families.

"Has that fellow ever bothered you before, Emily?" asked Don, as he walked with her up the street.

"Two or three times he has asked me to go riding with him," replied Emily. "But I have refused and got away from him as quickly as I could. But to-day there was no one around and he was bound to make me go with him. Oh, I'm so glad that you came along when you did!"

"If he ever troubles you again let me know and I'll find a way to stop him. I guess he's through for to-day, anyhow, but just to make sure I'll see you home."

Emily protested that this would take him too

far out of his way, but Don persisted, and they walked along chatting merrily.

It had rained hard that morning, and although the sun had now come out, the going was rather heavy on the outskirts of the town. At the crossings especially the roads were quagmires, and the boy and girl had to pick their steps with care.

They had reached an especially muddy spot when suddenly there was a rush and an automobile turned the corner, driving straight through a pool and splashing mud and water on Don's suit and Emily's frock.

They stepped back with startled exclamations, Emily looking with dismay at her pretty dress, and Don reaching for his handkerchief to wipe the mud from his face that had been plentifully bespattered.

"Oh, isn't this a mess!" moaned Emily.

"Of all the reckless driving!" ejaculated Don angrily. "That fellow ought—"

He broke off abruptly as a series of mocking honks rent the air, and, gazing after the car, he saw the grinning face of Brock Harrington looking back at them triumphantly.

For a moment Don was transfixed, seething with rage.

While he stands there, white-hot with indignation, it may be well for the benefit of those

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who have not read the preceding volumes of this series to tell briefly something of Don's experiences before this story opens.

Don Sturdy had been born and brought up on the old Sturdy place at Hillville, a thriving town about fifty miles distant from New York City. He was a tall, strongly built boy, unusually muscular for his age, of a frank, straightforward nature, truthful, genial and courageous.

His father, Richard Sturdy, was a noted explorer who, when Don was about fourteen, had embarked with Mrs. Sturdy and their daughter Ruth, two years younger than Don, on the vessel *Mercury* for a trip that was to last a year. Months passed without news of the ship or voyagers, and gradually the dreadful conviction was forced on Don that the vessel had gone down and that his parents and sister were lost.

The blow was a terrible one to Don, and it seemed impossible for him to become reconciled to it. He had been left at home under the guardianship of his two uncles, Captain Frank Sturdy, brother of Richard Sturdy, and Professor Amos Regor Bruce, a brother of Mrs. Sturdy.

Captain Sturdy was a big, powerful man of herculean frame, a dead shot and a noted big game hunter. He had roamed over most of the wild places of the world, collecting animals and reptiles for zoölogical companies. He and Don

had many qualities in common that drew them closely together, and under his uncle's tutelage Don had become almost as good a marksman as the captain himself.

Professor Bruce was of a different type, placid, calm, yet full of courage when need demanded. He was a renowned scholar and a member of many learned societies. He also was a rover, and his work in collecting specimens, mummies, and minerals for museums had carried him to the remotest corners of the earth.

The captain and the professor, both of whom were bachelors, were called to Northern Africa in the interest of their work, and in order to divert Don's mind they resolved to take him along with them. They found themselves on the verge of the Sahara Desert and were soon involved in a maze of adventures.

Don had the good luck, aided by his own courage, to rescue from an attack by rascally Arabs Teddy Allison, a boy of about the same age as himself, whose father had been captured and taken away into slavery. Before long the Sturdys had organized an expedition to rescue Mr. Allison and at the same time, if they could, to discover a mysterious Cave of Emeralds and the wonderful City of Brass in the heart of the sandy wastes. What obstacles they surmounted in doing it, the hardships they suffered from hunger and thirst, the fights they had with the

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Tuareg bandits, all the thrilling circumstances connected with the hunt for the emeralds, are told in the first volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy on the Desert of Mystery."

Don was amply repaid for his efforts in behalf of Teddy's father when he learned from the latter some details of the sinking of the *Mercury*, which had indeed gone down off Cape Horn, that led him to hope that his parents might still be alive. The clew was slender, but it was a clew, and it pointed to Brazil as the probable landing place of the survivors from the shipwreck. As his uncles were as eager as himself to find the missing ones, they organized an expedition to go to Brazil, a project rendered the easier by contracts that the captain had to hunt big snakes in that region while the professor was commissioned to secure rare drugs. They plunged into the wilds of the Amazon where they had stirring adventures with jaguars, crocodiles and anacondas, as related in a volume called "Don Sturdy with the Big Snake Hunters."

Don counted all his dangers as nothing when he found his sister Ruth in a Brazilian city. Her parents had been with her, but had mysteriously vanished and she had fallen ill and been taken to a hospital. Under the loving ministrations of Don and his uncles, Ruth was soon restored to health and taken home to America.

They had not been home long before a cable message came from Don's mother who, they thus learned, was in Alexandria, Egypt. Don and his uncles immediately set out for Egypt, found Mrs. Sturdy and sent her home, and then set out to find Don's father. What dangers they encountered in that land of mystery, their underground adventures in catacombs reputed to be haunted, how they laid the "ghost," discovered wonderful treasures in ancient tombs, and finally found Don's father are told in detail in a volume entitled "Don Sturdy in the Tombs of Gold."

Some time after their return Captain Sturdy had an opportunity to go to the North Pole in an airship and Don was invited to go along. His parents objected at first, but finally yielded to Don's pleading and he embarked on the adventure. The storms that beat upon the airship, Don's fall from the flying craft into the snowdrifts of the Arctic wastes, his adventures with polar bears, his narrow escapes from death, are told in the preceding volume of this series, entitled: "Don Sturdy Across the North Pole."

And now to return to Don as he looked with wrathful eyes at the gloating Harrington, who had taken so mean and cowardly a method of revenge.

For a moment he was too angry to move or

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speak. Then he made a dash for the car, which had stopped about a block away.

At this movement, Brock's head was hurriedly withdrawn and an instant later he had thrown in the clutch and started the car. The machine got under headway before Don had quite reached it, and he was forced to give up the chase and return to Emily, who was still surveying ruefully her frock and trying to get some of the mud off of it.

"Wasn't it just contemptible?" she said, as Don rejoined her.

"That's too weak a word," replied Don. "Of all sneaking, low-down tricks that takes the cake. It would have been bad enough if he had done it to me alone, but to try to spoil a girl's dress— Well, just wait till I get hold of Brock Harrington! He won't always have his car to get out of reach with, the coward."

"He must have been following us," conjectured Emily.

"Of course he was," replied Don. "He made a wide circle and got in behind us. Then he timed his rush so as to dash through that muddy pool just as we got there. I suppose he's chuckling right now at the success of his brave deed. Did you see the grin on his face as he looked back at us? He wouldn't have worn it long if I'd been able to get on the running board of that car!"

"Fred will be furious when he learns about this," remarked Emily, as they resumed their walk.

"Of course he will," agreed Don. "What brother wouldn't?"

"Oh, well, don't let it spoil our afternoon," said Emily. "He isn't worth soiling your hands with. Auntie will help me, and we'll be able to make the dress presentable, though I'm sure I shall never feel the same in it again! It is new and this is the first time I've had it on."

Before long they came in sight of the Turner house, and saw Fred and his aunt seated on the porch.

They cast a startled look at the bedraggled pair and rose to their feet.

"Good gracious, Emily!" exclaimed her aunt, "what on earth has happened to you?"

"You look like something that the cat dragged in," said Fred, with brotherly frankness.

"There wasn't any cat in this," replied Don, as he went up the steps. "We ran across a skunk!"

CHAPTER III

IMPENDING TROUBLE

"Just what do you mean by that remark, Don?" asked Fred, as he and his aunt looked at each other in amazement.

"It was a two-legged skunk," explained Don. "It's name is Brock Harrington."

"What has he been doing?" asked Fred, a flush of wrath suffusing his face.

Don, with occasional remarks interjected by Emily, narrated the events of the afternoon. Fred fairly boiled over with anger.

"The cheap cur!" he ejaculated. "There isn't another fellow in town that would have done a thing like that. But he'll get his the next time I see him."

"Leave him to me," said Don. "I owe him something, and I sure am anxious to pay the debt. But I'll have to go now or I'll be late for supper. Come over and see us, all of you, as soon as you can."

With repeated and cordial thanks from all for the help he had been to Emily, Don left them for the village, where he discharged his

errand for his father and then, in the twilight, made his way toward home.

His mother chanced to be passing through the hall as he came in, and stopped short in surprise as she saw the state of his clothes.

"Why, what has happened to you, Don dear?" she asked. "Did you have a fall? You're not hurt, I hope," she added.

"Not a bit, mother," responded the son cheerily. "An automobile splashed mud and water over me and mussed me up a lot, but that's all. I'll just slip into some other clothes and be down to supper in a jiffy."

His mother passed on and Don ran up to his room, changed his clothes, and hurried down to the dining room where he found the rest of the family assembled.

It was not until the dessert was reached that Captain Sturdy broached the matter he had in mind.

"I'd better make the most of meals like this," he said, as he stirred his coffee with a sigh of contentment. "In a little while I'll be roughing it again, and I'll have to eat not what I want but what I can get."

Don's father looked up interestedly.

"I suppose you are referring to that Alaskan trip you were telling me about," he said. "Have you come to any definite conclusion as to the time you are going to start?"

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"In about a couple of weeks," replied the captain. "I see that a scientific expedition is to leave San Francisco shortly, bound for the same region, and I think it will be a good thing to go along with that if I can make the proper arrangements. How about you, Amos?" he asked, turning to Professor Bruce. "Could you be ready by that time?"

"Easily," was the reply. "And I think it is an excellent idea to attach ourselves to the party that you speak of. Some of my friends are in it, and they might help to further considerably the investigations I have in mind. One of them made a study of the eruption of Mount Pelée in Martinique some years ago, and he could give me the benefit of his first-hand study of volcanic ash."

"It would be a mighty nice thing if you could go along with us, Richard," said the captain, addressing himself to Don's father.

"I'd like nothing better," said Mr. Sturdy, in whom the explorer's instinct was again stirring. "But I'm afraid the doctor would put his veto on it just now, and then, too, there are business matters that I can hardly leave at their present stage."

"Well, since that is so," replied the captain with an affectation of carelessness that was too elaborate to be entirely convincing, "suppose

you let Don come along as your representative."

Mrs. Sturdy stiffened in her chair as though she had received an electric shock.

"No! No!"

"Oh, please don't say that, mother!" burst out Don impetuously. "I'm crazy to go with Uncle Frank and Uncle Amos. It will be altogether different from any place I was ever in before. And remember, it isn't as if I were going to the North Pole or to some place on the other side of the ocean. I'll still be in the United States territory. You wouldn't object if I were going to Chicago or Denver or even to San Francisco. And this is only a little way farther on. Please don't object to my going."

"But it's out in the wilds!" protested his mother. "And there are volcanoes and blizzards and wild beasts!"

"And we've had you with us only a little while since you got back from that North Pole trip," said Ruth, very close to tears. "You nearly lost your life up there."

"There, there," said the captain soothingly, "you're putting too bad a face on things. As for the blizzards, we'll be most of the time in a place that's as warm as a Turkish bath, a place where the water's so hot that it will set a stick on fire. As for the volcanoes, they usually give

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warning in advance of an eruption, and we'll have time to get out of danger. As for the wild beasts—well, Don's a dead shot and has met them before without injury except to the beasts, and I'm not such a rotten marksman myself. What do you think of it, Richard?" he added, turning to Don's father.

"Personally I have no objections," commenced Mr. Sturdy slowly. "Don, as you say, has proved that he can take good care of himself, and the trip would be of great educational value. But of course Alice and I will have to talk the matter over together before we can give a definite answer. Suppose we let the matter drop just now and return to it later."

With this partial victory Don was forced to be content. But his hopes were high that his mother could be won over to his side.

But if the subject was dropped in the dining room, that was by no means the case in the kitchen, where Jenny got into action as soon as she had taken out the dishes.

"I feel as if I was bewitched," she broke out to Mrs. Roscoe as she reënforced her eloquence with a fresh stick of gum. "What with all the talk of kindling fire with water, either this family is loony or I am, an' I don't think it's me, 'cause I always had sense enough to stay in a good home where I could have my vittles regular an' go to the movies onct in a while, an'

here's the cap'n an' Mister Don leavin' a home like this an' goin' gallivantin' among wild beasts an' Turkish baths an' gizzards jest as they did when they went down where them golcondas an' cannonballs was, that would have eat 'em up as quick as a wink if they could have got a hold of 'em, an' when they went to the land of the pigamids and the spinach, where all them plagues was, an' seein' an orful ghost in them tombs of old Paresis an' then, as if that wasn't enough, traipsin' off to the North Pole, when goodness knows they could 'a got all the poles a body could want in any lumberyard, an' now talkin' about going to Alabaster! What I say is, an' I'd say it before any judge or jury, though thank goodness I ain't never yet had to go to court, even if I did come mighty near it when I see Hi Hawkins get knocked down by an automobile an' he sued the feller for damages, an' then couldn't collect 'cause the feller didn't have no money, an' what I say is that a feller that hasn't got no money has no right to be runnin' a car. But as I was sayin', when folks that's got a good home like this is ain't got gumption enough to stay in it but go off into heathen places looking for trouble, they're flyin' in the face of Providence, an' they'll meet up with somethin' that will be a judgment on 'em, an' anyway I'm glad my skirts is clear of it an'—"

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She paused for a moment to take breath and Mrs. Roscoe seized the opportunity.

"All right, Jenny," she said, "we'll admit that your skirts are clear of it. Now suppose you get busy and wash those dishes."

A little later in the evening, Don's father called him aside.

"I've had a talk with your mother, Don," he said, "and we've come to the conclusion that you can go on this Alaskan trip."

"Bully!" cried Don, his face radiant.

"Ordinarily," continued his father, throwing his arm affectionately over the boy's shoulder, "I should feel some hesitation about letting you go. But the experiences you have gone through have developed your good sense and judgment beyond your years, and I have every confidence in you. Then, too, you are going with your uncles, and you could not have better advisers and guardians."

"Except yourself," cried Don impulsively. "Oh, Dad, how I wish you were going along!"

"It would be a great adventure," said Mr. Sturdy, with a look of longing in his eyes. "If my health were a little better and I didn't have this Harrington matter on my mind—"

"Harrington!" exclaimed Don.

CHAPTER IV

TEDDY TURNS UP

MR. STURDY looked at his son, a little surprised at his vehemence.

"Yes, Harrington," he said. "What about it?"

"Do you mean the Harrington who lives in Hillville—the man who moved here from San Francisco—Brock Harrington's father?" asked Don.

"I believe he has a son named Brock," replied Mr. Sturdy. "What is there about that to stir you up so?"

"Only that I had a run-in with Brock this very afternoon," replied Don.

"You did!"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Mr. Sturdy. "How did it come about?"

"He was trying to force Emily Turner to get into his car to take a ride with him," explained Don. "I interfered and made him stop. Then he followed us without our knowing it, drove his car through a pool at a street corner and

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plastered us all over with mud. I chased the car, but he got away before I could reach him."

"So that's the kind of fellow he is!" exclaimed Mr. Sturdy indignantly. "I guess he comes rightly by it though, if there's anything in the saying 'like father, like son.'"

"I don't know anything about his father," said Don. "If he's anything like Brock he must be a peach—and a rotten peach at that, believe me!"

"I guess they're pretty much alike," mused Mr. Sturdy, "though Dwight Harrington is, perhaps, a smoother type. But in essential qualities they probably make a pair. I'm sorry this thing happened," he added, with a little frown of anxiety creasing his brow.

"Why?" asked Don quickly. "You wouldn't have had me do anything else than I did, would you, Dad?"

"Not at all," replied his father warmly. "You acted exactly right. I'd have been ashamed of you if you had done anything else. The young rascal richly deserved a thrashing. What I'm sorry for is that Brock was such a cur that you were forced to act as you did."

"I don't exactly understand," said Don. "I didn't know that you had anything to do with Mr. Harrington."

"I wouldn't have anything to do with him willingly," replied his father. "He's a man

whom I dislike and distrust. But I've been brought into contact with him by a matter that's altogether outside of my own choosing. The fact is, Dwight Harrington claims ownership of part of the very land on which this house is built."

"What?" cried Don, all aflame with surprise and resentment. "This home of ours? Why, he must be crazy! How does he get that way? Why, you've owned it for years and years!"

"Since long before you were born," agreed Mr. Sturdy. "That is, I bought it, paid for it, and supposed it was mine. But he claims that the land consisted originally of two parcels, and that there was a flaw in the title of one of them so that it never really passed to me."

"But even if that were so, where does Harrington come in?" asked Don, in complete bewilderment.

"It seems," replied his father, "that he has been quietly buying up some pieces of property adjoining mine, probably on some inside knowledge he has that the railroad is going to lay a line through that section. If it does, he will be able to sell his holdings at a large profit. The line, if it is really laid, would pass through a section of my property. In looking up the titles of the land he has bought he has probably looked up the circumstances under which I

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bought mine. At any rate, he claims that there was a defect in the title that was conveyed to me, that it never legally passed from the possession of the man who sold it to me, and that I am therefore virtually a squatter on the property."

"Even if you are, what is that to him?" asked Don.

"Just this," was the explanation. "It seems that he has looked up the previous owner, corrected the flaw in the title, and has now bought it from him so that he may hold the legal title while mine may not be worth the paper it is written on."

"Then all the good money you paid for it might as well have been thrown in the gutter!" exclaimed Don, in dismay.

"If Harrington's claim is upheld, yes," replied Mr. Sturdy. "I might sue the seller to get my money back or to compel him to give me a good title, but he may have nothing and the courts might hold that it was a case of 'let the buyer beware' and confirm Harrington's claim."

Don's face was a picture of consternation and dismay.

"Don't look so downhearted, son," said Mr. Sturdy. "You can be sure that I'm not going to take this lying down. I'll fight it to the last ditch. I've already put the matter into the

hands of my lawyers. If it comes to the courts, Harrington may lose. It may be that he himself is hoping that it will not get that far and is simply trying to extort money from me to buy him off. In either case, he's struck the wrong customer."

"The whole thing is a dirty piece of business!" cried Don hotly.

"Of course it is," agreed his father. "It's the method of the hyena and the fox. Honorable business men don't do that kind of work. But from all I can learn, Dwight Harrington is very far from being an honorable business man."

"He's very rich, isn't he?" asked Don.

"He is reputed to be," replied Mr. Sturdy. "But there's something mysterious and shady about the sources of his wealth. Nobody seems to know what business he is really in. He gives himself out vaguely as a broker, but that may mean anything or nothing. Nothing probably, in a place of this size. But the scale on which he lives shows that he has a good deal of money, no matter where it comes from."

"Well, I only hope that if it comes to a fight you'll beat him to a frazzle," declared Don with warmth.

"I hope to," replied his father. "But anything that gets into the courts is uncertain as to the outcome. Sometimes it's decided on equity

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alone. In that case, I'll win. Then again a technicality sometimes carries the day. In that case I may lose. But we'll simply keep up our courage and hope for the best."

"Do you think this mix-up I had with Brock will do you any injury?" asked Don anxiously.

"Oh, probably not," replied his father. "It may make Harrington vindictive and more determined to do me all the harm he can. But don't let that worry you a particle. You did exactly right and I wouldn't have had a son of mine do anything else. Just dismiss the whole matter from your mind. You know the old saying that the worst things that befall us are those that never happen. Perhaps this will be a case in point."

Just then there came a ring at the telephone.

"I'll answer it," said Don, as he sprang to it and took down the receiver. "I think it's from Teddy."

Sure enough, it was the old familiar voice that came over the wire.

"Is this you, Don?"

"No one else but," was Don's inelegant reply. "I've been looking for a 'phone from you all evening."

"Just got in," was the answer. "The minute they told me you had called up I made a dive for the 'phone. What's up, old boy? I take it

that you didn't want merely to hear the musical tones of my voice."

"Not simply that," replied Don. "I can get an operatic tenor on the phonograph when I'm hankering for melody. Say, Brick, how would you like to go on a trip to Alaska, to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes?"

There was a gasp at the other end of the line.

"Gee!" exclaimed Teddy, after a second, "what do you mean by springing a thing like that on me? Don't you know that I have a weak heart? Will I go? Will a duck swim? Will a bee buzz? Will an eel wriggle? You bet I'll go—that is, if dad will let me. But what do you mean by the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes? Sounds like Pittsburgh."

"Nothing like that," returned Don, with a laugh. "It's a valley where there are thousands and thousands of columns of smoke or steam coming up through cracks and holes in the earth, where you can cook your dinner without making a fire, where there are volcanoes for you to fall down into and bears to eat you up and lots of other little things like that. Uncle Frank and Uncle Amos are going. They offered to take me along and I put in a word for you, and there you are."

"Sounds mighty good to me," said Teddy.

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"If I can make dad see it in the same way I'll be there with bells on. What time are you going to start?"

"In about two weeks," Don replied. "We go to San Francisco and sail up the coast from there to Alaska. We'll be gone a couple of months, perhaps a little longer."

"That's fine and dandy," replied Teddy. "The longer the better. I'm crazy to get away from New York and out into the open again. I guess that experience in the Sahara and in Egypt has spoiled me for city life. I'll get busy with dad right away, and trust little Teddy to do the begging stunt all right. If he says yes, you'll see me making tracks for Hillville so fast that I'll only hit the high spots."

"You can't come too soon or too fast," Don assured him. "I'll be on edge until I know you can go. Nine-tenths of the fun of the trip will be gone for me unless you can come along. And put the soft pedal on the bears when you talk the matter over with your father. They may not appeal to him as strongly as they do to us."

"Probably not," laughed Teddy. "He might have a prejudice against having his only son eaten up by a bear. Fathers are unreasonable that way, you know."

They talked a while longer, and then Don hung up the receiver after eliciting Teddy's

promise to let him know the decision at the earliest moment possible.

That Teddy had let no grass grow under his feet and had not overestimated his powers of eloquence was demonstrated sooner than Don had dared to hope. For the family had but just risen from the breakfast table the next morning when there came a ring at the doorbell.

Don, who had just stepped into the hall, opened the front door and stood transfixed.

CHAPTER V

TRACKED BY BULLIES

"DON!"

"Teddy!"

There stood Teddy, the grinning, irrepressible Teddy, his fiery mop of hair that had gained him the nickname of "Brick" showing under the edge of the cap perched jauntily on the back of his head.

Don grabbed his hand and wrung it till his friend winced.

"Easy on the lunch hook," admonished Brick. "I need it in my business. Didn't expect to see me so soon, did you?" he continued, as Don drew him joyously into the hall.

"No," replied Don. "But I'm tickled to death now that you've come. I can see from your face that you have good news."

"The best," declared Teddy. "I'm going. Oh, I'm some fast worker, I am. Kept my father up till midnight until at last he agreed to let me go just to get rid of me."

"Glory hallelujah!" exclaimed Don, in vast delight. "You sure are some speed boy."

"Caught the earliest train out of New York," explained Teddy. "And now bring on your bears and volcanoes. They can't frighten me. I eat bears for breakfast and pick my teeth with pine trees. When I howl, the wild beasts slink to their caves. I'm a bad man. In fact, there are only two bad men in the State and I'm both of them."

"Same old Teddy, I see," remarked Captain Sturdy, as he came out from the dining room and slapped Teddy on the back. "As you haven't been talking exactly in whispers, I gather that your father has agreed to let you go with us. I'm glad to hear it. It will be mighty good," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "to have such a wild game hunter along with us."

Teddy grinned, a little abashed that the captain had overheard his nonsense, and Don laughingly drew him into the living room, where he was warmly greeted by the rest of the family, with all of whom he was a prime favorite.

"And now," said Teddy, when a little later he was seated with Don up in the latter's room, "let's hear something about the place we're going to. I've been looking up the map of Alaska since you 'phoned me, but I couldn't find anything about the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes."

"That's because it's a rather recent discov-

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ery and you must have been looking at an old map," replied Don. "It was a new thing to me, too, until Uncle Frank told me about it. The district is in a peninsula on the southeast coast of Alaska, not far from the sea. There's a big volcano there called Katmai, and it blew up in nineteen twelve.

"No one lived around there, and the world in general didn't know the eruption had taken place until scientists in different countries began to notice a sort of dry fog different from anything that had been seen before that spread out over almost all the earth. They investigated and found that the fog was caused by the dust and ashes that had gone up from the volcano and partly shut out the heat and light of the sun. Then an expedition went up there and found out about the eruption. While they were studying that they came across this Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. I told you something about that over the 'phone."

"Yes, the holes in the ground with smoke or steam coming out," said Teddy. "It must be a wonderful sight."

"They found bear tracks about the steam vents—fumaroles they call them—which showed that the animals that had been scared away by the explosion were coming back again," went on Don. "And from what Uncle Frank tells me, those fellows are sockdolagers,

bigger even than grizzlies. He's anxious to get some of them."

"Provided they don't get him," put in Teddy, with a grin.

"Bears have never done it yet, though some of the big polar ones tried it not long ago," replied Don. "And there are wonderful forests there too, some of them of charred stumps that were burned by the lava and hot ash that came from the eruption and others of live trees that are full of game: moose, caribou, foxes, wolves and wolverines. There are all sorts of water fowl—ducks, geese and swans. Then there are swift streams with big trout, some of them two or three feet long that snap at a hook as soon as it is thrown in but fight like the mischief before they let you land them. And there are great cataracts where you can see the salmon leaping up in thousands. Oh, I tell you it's a land of wonders, all right!"

"You said something that time, old boy," said Teddy enthusiastically. "And I have a hunch right now that we're in for the time of our lives."

A little later as they were passing through the yard they came across Jenny, who was hanging up the clothes.

"Hello, Jenny!" called Teddy, who knew her well from his many visits to the Sturdy home.

"Howdy do, Mister Teddy," replied Jenny,

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removing some clothespins from her mouth so that she could speak more plainly. "I heerd you when you came in this mornin', an' I sez to myself, sez I, there's another poor boy that's bein' led like a lamb to the slaughter, goin' up with them others to be et up by bears an' fall-in' maybe into them bolcanoes, an' all covered with lather, though goodness know what they want lather for in them places where they ain't no barber shops—"

"She means lava," murmured Don, in an undertone.

"Well, you see, Jenny," put in Teddy gravely, "we'll need the lather because we'll have plenty of close shaves."

"I don't see nothin' sproutin' on your upper lip," said Jenny. "An' what I say is that it's a shame to take two young lads that has all their lives afore them up where they may be et up by bears, as if it wasn't bad enough to take you down among them bo constructors in Brazil who might have squoze you to death, an' because you got off that time doesn't say that you will the next time 'cause the pitcher that goes to the well too often is broke at last, an'—"

To what lengths Jenny's indignant eloquence might have carried her must remain unknown, for a call came from the housekeeper and she hurried in to answer the summons.

"Isn't she a hot sketch!" chuckled Teddy, as the boys moved along.

"The best ever," laughed Don. "I'd like to put her on the radio and start her going. She'd tie the people up in knots."

That evening the two boys went over to call on Fred and Emily Turner, with whom Teddy, as well as Don, was on the friendliest of terms.

"How did you make out with the dress, Emily?" asked Don, as he sat down on one of the steps of the porch.

"Not very well," replied Emily. "Auntie and I have done our best, but some of the spots won't come out."

"That's too bad," said Don warmly. "Brock Harrington ought to be made to pay for it."

"Let me in on this," interposed Teddy. "What about the dress and who is Brock Harrington?"

"He's the biggest bully in town," put in Fred. "He was trying to make Emily take a ride with him in his car yesterday when Don interfered. Later he followed them and drove his car through a puddle, splashing them both with mud from head to foot."

"The sneak!" exclaimed Teddy. "What did you do to him, Don?"

"Chased his car," replied Don. "But he stepped on the gas and got away from me."

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"He ought to have the hide stripped from him," declared Teddy indignantly.

"He'll get his, yet," said Don. "That is, if I get a chance at him before I leave Hillville."

"Leave Hillville!" came from Fred and Emily, in accents of dismay.

"Just for a little while," explained Don, and then in response to their eager questionings told them of his projected trip.

"I'm so sorry!" exclaimed Emily. "We'll all miss you very much."

"You bet we will," said Fred. "Gee, but you're lucky fellows! You've already seen more of the world than I'm likely to in my lifetime. How I wish I could go along with you!"

"I wish you were going," said Don heartily. "Perhaps on the next trip we take we'll be able to arrange it."

It was late when at last Don and Teddy said good-night and started for home.

"What is that?" said Teddy suddenly, as they were taking a short cut through the woods.

"What is what?" asked Don in return. "I didn't hear anything."

"Listen!" said Teddy, stopping short.

Though they strained their ears, they heard nothing.

"Guess you must have been dreaming," chaffed Don, preparing to resume his walk.

A twig cracked.

"I tell you some one is following us," persisted Teddy.

"Well, what if they are?" returned Don. "Others may be taking this cut through the woods just as we are. The woods are free. Come along."

Now the sounds were multiplied, and the boys distinctly heard footsteps.

"There's more than one, and they're coming in a hurry," declared Teddy.

There was no mistaking that he was right, and Don for the first time began to think that something serious might be in the wind.

On either side of the path where they found themselves at the moment was a big oak.

"You step behind one of these and I'll take the other," Don directed Teddy. "Perhaps we can see without being seen just who these fellows are."

They did so and waited.

A minute later three young men, one of them carefully dressed and the other two rough-looking fellows, passed by them almost within arm's reach. They hurried along until they reached the edge of the woods, which was just a little farther on.

The three stood grouped there as though in bewilderment. The moon was up and the level ground in front of them was so clearly lighted

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that any moving figures could have been seen. But the landscape was empty.

“That’s queer,” said one of them. “They were just ahead of us a minute ago.”

Don started. That voice! He had heard it before. And just then a fleck of moonlight fell upon the speaker’s face.

It was Brock Harrington!

CHAPTER VI

A MERITED THRASHING

DON did not hesitate for a moment, but stole over to the tree behind which Teddy was standing.

"You were right about their following us," he whispered. "It's Brock Harrington and a couple of his pals, rough fellows about the town, that he's picked up to help him do his dirty work. They're out to do us up—or rather, to do me up."

"Us," declared Teddy loyally. "If they do you up, they'll have to do me up too."

"Good old scout!" said Don, pressing his arm.

"What's your plan?" whispered Teddy.

"I'm going to take the bull by the horns," replied Don. "They're more than we are and bigger, but I'm sure that Brock has a yellow streak. Probably the others have too, or they wouldn't stoop to this kind of thing. Of course, we might slip back the way we came and get away from them. But I'm not going to run."

"Bully boy!" commended Teddy.

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"Now this is what I'm going to do," went on Don. "I'm going out to face them while you stay here—"

"Not on your life!" declared Teddy. "I'm going with you."

"Let me finish," said Don. "You stay here until you see me soak Brock. Then you come rushing out yelling like a wild Indian and shouting for others to follow you and pitch into one of the others. Ten to one they'll get scared, think there are others with you, and run. Get me?"

"I'll be there," promised Teddy.

In the meantime an animated colloquy had been going on among their pursuers.

"They must have given us the slip," growled Brock, grinding his heel into the earth with vexation.

"Perhaps they turned off on that trail to the right," suggested one of his companions.

"More likely they're hiding in the woods somewhere," conjectured the third. "They may have heard us coming and got scared."

"Just as I was aching to give him a licking!" exclaimed Brock. "I'd give a hundred dollars to get sight of him!"

"Hand over your hundred," said Don quietly, appearing before them as suddenly as though he had risen from the earth.

All started violently, and Brock almost fell over backward.

"So there you are!" he exclaimed, recovering himself with an effort.

"Right here," replied Don. "What about it?"

"You'll mighty soon find out what about it," snarled Brock, with a note of malignant triumph in his voice. "You're going to get the licking of your life. I'll teach you to butt into my affairs."

"Are you going to lick me or did you bring your friends along to help you?" asked Don, in the same even voice.

"Never you mind," cried Brock, as he motioned to his pals. "The main thing is that you're going to get it. I'll—"

The sentence remained unfinished.

Don's fist shot out in a crashing blow between the eyes.

Brock staggered backward and at the same instant Teddy came plunging toward the startled group.

"Come along, fellows! Hurry up and give them Jesse!" he yelled, as he pitched into the fellow nearest him, his fists going like flails.

The sudden onslaught, the impetus with which he threw himself upon his opponent, the uncertainty as to how many might be with him, com-

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bined with the darkness and their own guilty consciences, had the effect on which Don had counted. Brock's confederates took to their heels, running as though an army were after them.

Brock would have followed, but he was momentarily dazed by the blow he had received and Don barred his way.

"Put up your hands, Brock Harrington," he commanded.

"You're two against one," whimpered Brock. Don laughed shortly.

"That's pretty good, coming from you," he said. "But I'll promise that no one shall touch you but me."

Still aching from the blow he had received, this was of small comfort to Brock. He held his hands limply at his side.

"Have I got to slap your face to make you fight?" asked Don contemptuously.

"My nose is bleeding," muttered the craven. "I've had enough."

A disgusted snort came from Teddy.

"That sounds like a fellow that would splash mud over a girl's dress!" he exclaimed.

"I can't hit a fellow who won't defend himself, but at least I've given you something to remember me by," remarked Don. "And that isn't a circumstance to what you will get if you ever give me any more reason to thump you."

Now get out and hunt up those other cowards of yours and tell them how we put it over on them. You'd better bring a dozen of them along next time."

Brock picked up his cap, which had been knocked off, and slunk away through the woods. Don and Teddy watched him go with a smile of amusement on their faces.

"That's where strategy won against numbers," remarked Don, with a laugh, as the two boys started again for home.

"Pretty nifty headwork, if you ask me," said Teddy admiringly. "To say nothing of the arm and fist work! Gee, Don, that was a sockdologer you handed him!"

"I'd never have pulled it off without your help," said Don. "Those yells would have done credit to a Comanche, and you went into that husky like a load of brick. They were scared stiff. I'll bet they're running yet."

The next few days were exceedingly busy ones. Don already had a pretty complete outfit for the trip, in the way of heavy clothing and furs that he had used on the trip to the North Pole in the *Red Monarch*. Brick, however, had to get everything new, and he was surprised at the number of things that seemed indispensable.

"Don't forget that we'll be traveling over pretty rough country," Don reminded him. "A pair of shoes won't last very long, and we'll be

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a long way from the nearest place where they can be bought."

"I suppose you're right," assented Brick. "But I'll have to get an extra trunk to put all that stuff in."

"I guess not," said Don. "I've got a big one, and you can put your surplus stuff into that. We want to make our luggage as compact as possible. Some of our equipment we'll throw away when it's served its purpose. We don't want any extra baggage."

"You can bet that I don't want to tote any more than I have to over the wastes of Alaska," replied Teddy. "And I don't suppose there'll be any bus to meet us there," he added, with a grin.

"You'll have seen your last bus when you leave the docks in San Francisco," Don assured him. "I'd hate to say how long it will be after that before you see another one. Maybe you'll fall down the crater of a volcano and never see one again."

"That sounds cheerful," remarked Teddy. "But how about yourself? There's nothing to keep you from doing the same thing, is there?"

"Nothing except the fact that I'm going to try mighty hard not to," said Don. "I can think of plenty of things that would be lots more fun."

"Well, it isn't my idea of pleasure either,"

laughed Brick. "I guess we'll agree to keep out of the volcanoes, especially when there's a pool of red-hot lava at the bottom. But what do you think I ought to take along in the way of guns? You're an expert in that line, and I don't know much about it."

"You won't have to bother your head about that," replied Don. "Between Uncle Frank and myself, we ought to be able to fit you out to the queen's taste. He has a regular arsenal, enough to supply a small army."

"I guess he won't miss one or two," Teddy conjectured. "Well, I guess we've listed just about everything we'll be likely to need. Let's go over it once more to make sure."

The list received the approval of Captain Sturdy, who had been equally busy with the boys in perfecting the details of the trip.

"We'll sail a week from to-day," he informed the lads one evening. "Your Uncle Amos and I have completed all our arrangements with the members of the scientific party, and we're to meet them in San Francisco. We learned that they have chartered a steam yacht, the *Margaret*, a speedy up-to-date sea-going boat, and we ought to make good time up the coast on our way to the Land of Volcanoes."

"That sounds good!" exclaimed Don. "With everybody on board interested in the same thing, it ought to be a pleasant trip."

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The eagerly awaited day came at last. The leave-taking was hard, as it always was. Mrs. Sturdy clung to Don with tears that could not be repressed. Mr. Sturdy also was deeply moved. Ruth kissed him over and over. Mrs. Roscoe's eyes were moist and Jenny whimpered openly.

"Good-bye, if I don't never see you again, Mister Don," Jenny quavered. "An' don't smoke too much an' don't get et up by none of them Alabaster bears."

Don promised to avoid that catastrophe if possible, and amid a chorus of good wishes the party stepped into the car and were whirled by Dan, the hired man, to the railroad station.

Arriving there in plenty of time, Don and Brick strolled down the long platform while the two older members of the party were checking the baggage. The boys were not taking much notice of what was going on around them, being engrossed in thoughts of their coming trip.

Don was roused by some one who brushed roughly against him and after a momentary pause rushed toward the station exit. Almost thrown off his balance, Don turned with an exclamation and then stopped short in amazement.

"Why, that looks just like Brock Harrington!" he cried.

"It looks so much like him that it can't be anybody else," returned Teddy dryly.

"But what is he doing on this platform?" asked Don. "He isn't going to take this train or he wouldn't be leaving the station."

"Search me," murmured Teddy, shrugging his shoulders. "Perhaps he heard that we were going to take this train and came down to get a look at your back as you left town. He'd rather see your back than your face after the thump you gave him the other night."

Don shook his head.

"It may be so," he conceded dubiously. "Doesn't sound just right to me, though. That fellow had some reason for coming here and bumping up against me that way."

"Just to relieve his feelings perhaps," suggested Brick, with a grin. "He knew that he could get away before there was any comeback and he knew that you wouldn't want to kick up a row just when you were starting off. Oh, he's a dead game sport, that baby is, and don't you forget it!"

"All aboard, boys!" said Captain Sturdy, coming up to them, followed by the professor. "We're off at last. Say good-bye to Hillville, because it will be some time before you see it again."

They boarded the train, settled themselves in

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their seats, and the long journey across the continent began.

The first stage was comparatively short, and at New York they transferred to a transcontinental flyer. The four travelers had a private compartment with every comfort to relieve the monotony of the extended trip.

Not long after they had started, Captain Sturdy and Professor Bruce rose and went to another part of the coach to chat with an acquaintance who happened to be on the train, leaving Don and Teddy in full possession of the compartment.

"This is what I call class," remarked Don, as he stretched himself out on his comfortable seat. "They've got to hand it to us, that when we do travel we travel in style."

"We'd better make the most of it," said Teddy. "It won't be long that we'll have velvet cushions to lounge on and white sheets to sleep between and dandy meals with desserts and all the fixings."

"Right you are," agreed his companion. "But I suppose it will be pretty nifty traveling on the steam yacht before we get to roughing it. That ought to be about the classiest part of the trip, if the yacht is what it is cracked up to be. But probably you'll be so seasick that you won't know whether you are on a steam yacht

or a ferryboat," he added, with a grin, giving Teddy a nudge in the ribs.

"I don't suppose it will be so steady traveling as it would be on a big liner," admitted Teddy, who, although he had crossed the ocean several times, had seldom escaped seasickness. "But we'll hope for the best."

"It may be a case of missing some meals and giving up a good many more," was Don's cheerful prophecy. "But she's a pretty good sea-going boat for all that. Uncle Frank gave me a photograph of her last night, and you can take a squint at it if you like."

"Sure, let's see it."

Don reached into his coat pocket. The first thing his hand encountered was a tightly rolled wad of paper. He drew it out with an exclamation of surprise.

"How on earth did this get into my pocket?" he gasped. "I know well enough I never put it there!"

"I don't know who else would," replied Teddy. "Open it and let's see what it is."

With a puzzled frown, Don smoothed out the wrinkled piece of paper and quickly scanned its contents.

"Well, what do you know about that?" he exclaimed, with a snort of indignation and disgust. "Just look at that, Brick!"

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Teddy grasped the paper curiously.

"You are running away," was written in a scrawling hand. "But never mind. We will make your old man suffer for this."

The two boys looked at each other in astonishment.

"Sounds like a Black Hand threat," burst out Teddy. "Who in the world wrote it and how did it get into your pocket?"

Don shook his head. But suddenly an idea struck him and he leaped to his feet.

"I know how it got there!" he exclaimed. "Brock Harrington put it there when he shoved up against me on the station platform. That explains what he was doing there and why he was in a hurry to get away. The coward!"

"That's the answer, all right," agreed Teddy, with a nod. "The big lout has lots of nerve to hint that you're afraid of him after what happened in the woods that night."

"You can bet he wouldn't say it where I could hear him," replied Don. "That's Brock Harrington all over—up to all kinds of mean tricks and then ducking before he gets hurt!"

"He's a bird!" ejaculated Teddy. "But what does he mean when he says that we, whoever that may be beside himself, will make your old man suffer for this?"

"I suppose that refers to a property question

between Brock's father and mine," said Don. "Dad was telling me about it the other night. It seems that there's some question to the title of part of the property on which our home stands, and Dwight Harrington, Brock's father, by some shenanigan has bought up the previous owner's rights and now claims the land."

"The whole tribe of Harringtons seem to be nice people—I don't think," commented Teddy.

"From all I hear they're so crooked that they could hide behind corkscrews," replied Don. "Mr. Harrington is a slippery character. He's in some business that nobody knows about and has lots of money, though nobody knows where it comes from. He's heard that a branch of the railroad is going to run through the lower part of our property, and that's the reason he's so keen to get it, so that he can sell at a good price. Probably some shyster lawyers have helped him to cook up a scheme to defraud my father out of his property."

"Perhaps it's just a bluff to scare your father into buying him off," suggested Teddy. "Maybe he won't have the nerve ever to take it to court."

"Likely enough," agreed Don. "But he's barking up the wrong tree if he thinks he's going to frighten dad into anything. He'll fight the case for all it's worth. But of course it means lots of worry and expense, even if he

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comes out of the case right side up. And now I suppose Harrington will be more determined than ever, because Brock will be egging him on. Brock thinks anything that will hurt dad will hurt me. And he's right."

"It's just plain blackmailing!" exclaimed Teddy indignantly. "That Harrington ought to be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town. And just behind him Brock ought to be perched on another rail, with you carrying one end of the rail while I carried the other."

"It wouldn't matter so much if my father were in good strong health," remarked Don anxiously. "But he hasn't wholly recovered yet from his Egyptian experiences, and a thing like this may give him a setback."

"I hope not," said Teddy sympathetically. "But, don't worry, Don. That's just what Brock wanted you to do when he wrote this miserable note. Don't give him that satisfaction. He wanted to poison your enjoyment on this trip. Don't let him do it. Forget it."

"I'm going to," said Don, with decision, as he tore the note to bits. "That is, for the time. But when I get back, if I find they've put that dirty deal over on my father, I'll see that one fellow gets something that he'll never forget. And that fellow's name is Brock Harrington!"

CHAPTER VII

A STORM BREWING

THE trip across the continent was one of absorbing interest to both the young travelers. It was an old story to Don's uncles, who had made it many times, and they spent most of their time in reading and discussing the forthcoming trip.

But Don and Brick used their time and their eyes in feasting on the ever-changing panorama that unrolled before them as the fast train sped along. Villages and cities, meadow and woodland, lake and river, mountain and valley contained an endless store of fascination and instruction.

"The last time I crossed the continent was by airplane," remarked Don. "While it was great looking down from the *Red Monarch* on all that we passed over, we went so fast without any stops that I couldn't take it all in. Now I can get a better idea of things as we go along. Gee, it's a wonderful country, isn't it?"

"You bet it is!" replied Teddy. "There's nothing like it in the world. The fellow who

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advised everybody to see America first had the right dope."

"We might study the map of America for years and never know as much about it as we'll learn in these four days," remarked Don happily.

"You never said a truer thing," put in Professor Bruce, looking up from his paper. "That's the argument I've used with your father and mother when I've wanted to take you along on our trips. They felt a little doubt about having you lose so much time out of school—"

"Just like my dad," murmured Teddy. "That was what he stuck at when I was begging him to let me go."

"Exactly," assented the professor, with a smile. "It's rather hard for parents to see that travel is the best kind of an education. What you see with your eyes you'll remember far better than what you've learned by rote. You're taking in new facts and impressions every minute, breathing them in at every pore. You know ten thousand things about Egypt and the Sahara that you would never have known if you hadn't gone there. You're learning things now about America that would never have come to you simply from maps and descriptions. It will be the same when you get on board the boat that is going to carry us to

Alaska. You can go through the ship, talk to the sailors, visit the radio room, delve into the engine room, learn all about the machinery. It may seem more or less like play, but, as a matter of fact, your mind will never be working faster or more profitably."

"Wish I could have talked that way to dad," remarked Teddy, with a grin. "My job wouldn't have been half as hard."

"But you succeeded," replied the professor, smiling. "And now it's up to you to pick up everything you can on this trip, so that when you get home your father will feel that he did a good thing in letting you go."

In due time they were deposited in the new terminal at San Francisco, were whirled through the streets in a taxicab, and found themselves at the waterfront.

Moored a short distance out in the bay was a large, white yacht, powerful and speedy looking, on the bows of which they could make out the name *Margaret*.

"How does the boat look to you, boys?" asked Captain Sturdy. "Think she will do all right?"

"I should say so!" replied Don, with enthusiasm. "She's a beauty!"

"She sure is," echoed Brick. "Looks as though she could make some speed too. But how are we going to get aboard?"

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"You might try swimming," suggested Don. "It isn't far and the water isn't very cold on the California coast at any time of year."

"Maybe it isn't very cold, but it certainly looks wet," replied the grinning Teddy. "I think I'll wait for a boat, if it's all the same to you, Don."

"I think that's much the wiser plan," put in the professor, with a smile. "There's a boat putting off for us now. Guess they've been watching for us."

A trim little gasoline tender was soon snorting its way toward them, and a few minutes later it bumped gently against the dock. The Sturdy party clambered aboard, the crew took care of their baggage, and a little later they were all standing on the deck of the *Margaret*.

She was a craft some hundred and sixty feet long and was well designed for the comfort of her passengers. There was a roomy forecastle for the crew in connection with a fully equipped galley. Aft of this was the engine room and then the fire room. A radio room was furnished with powerful senders and receivers.

There was a large general cabin and dining saloon, from which opened a number of small but comfortable staterooms. Other compartments were fitted up with bunks, which folded up against the sides when not in use.

Two staterooms had been set aside for the Sturdy party, of which the captain and the professor occupied one and Don and Brick the other, a door connecting the two.

After they had got their suitcases unpacked and their belongings bestowed about their rooms, there was still some time before dinner would be served. Professor Bruce and Captain Sturdy went out to mingle with their fellow passengers of the scientific party, to renew old acquaintances and make new ones.

The *Margaret* had in the meantime got under way, as the Sturdy party constituted the last group of passengers for whom she had been waiting, and the boys spent the first hour of their time on shipboard in watching the scenes of busy life in the harbor as the ship passed out through the Golden Gate, where the sea lions, disporting on the rocks, bellowed a hoarse farewell as she sailed out into the Pacific.

"What do you say to going down into the engine room?" suggested Don, after the vessel had got fairly under way.

"Nothing would suit me better," acquiesced Teddy. "Here's where we get a chance to pick up some of the information that the professor was talking about on the train. But perhaps they're not so anxious to have land lubbers down there."

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"Well, they can't do any more than fire us," remarked Don. "Let's take a chance."

The boys went down into the depths, and were soon, with their likable personalities, on friendly terms with the "black gang," as the engine room force was called.

The chief engineer was an old Scotchman named McIntosh, and when he found that the boys took an intelligent interest in the mechanical outfit of the ship and did not ask foolish questions he willingly explained things that they did not understand.

They were especially interested in his explanation of the workings of the main engines, of which there were two, the vessel being of the twin-screw type.

"As ye may know, these engines are of the triple expansion kind," the old engineer pointed out. "We carry steam around two hundred pounds gauge, when the firemen are not too tired to keep it there. It goes first to this small, or high pressure, cylinder, and after shovin' down the piston it travels to the second cylinder, which, as ye can see, is considerably larger. Here it does the same thing over again and then is passed into the third, or low pressure, cylinder.

"By the time it gets through workin' there we think it well to gi'e it a rest an' sae we let it go into the condenser, whaur it is changed

back into water again. A verra handy thing to have on board of ship is steam."

"I should say it was," laughed Don. "It looks to me as though you made it work its passage, though. Not much of it seems to go to waste."

"We do our best," replied the grizzled veteran. "But e'en wi' the maist efficient engines, only a sma' part of the energy o' the coal is used. With our engines working at their maximum output, we dinna get as guid as twenty per cent efficiency."

"You say the steam from the low pressure cylinder exhausts into a condenser," said Don. "Would you mind telling me what that is for? Why can't you let the steam go right out into the air, the same as a locomotive does?"

"Well, the condenser does twa verra important things," replied McIntosh. "So that ye can understand me, I'll tell ye what a condenser is like inside. Yon's one of them, an' ye can see for yoursel's what it looks like outside," and he motioned with his pipe toward what looked to the boys like a large cylindrical tank.

"Inside that shell that ye're lookin' at is a great number o' small tubes through which cold sea water is pumped," he continued. "The steam comin' in contact with these cold tubes is condensed an' of course, as ye probably know, its volume is greatly decreased, which forms a

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powerful vacuum in the condenser. This forms a suction on the low pressure cylinder, which is equivalent to a higher steam pressure without a vacuum. An' this, as ye can verra readily see, peps up our engines to a considerable degree."

"Yes, that seems plain enough," said Don, with a nod of understanding. "But what is the other function of the condenser that you spoke of?"

"It saves our fresh water," explained McIntosh. "We use the same water over and over again, an' we can carry enough in our tanks to last us for several thousand miles, or in other words, till we can reach port and renew our supply."

"I suppose it wouldn't do to use salt water, would it?" asked Teddy.

McIntosh shook his head emphatically in the negative.

"Salt water is one of the verra worst things ye could put in a boiler," he said. "When the water changes to steam, it leaves the salt an' ither materials behind an' they form a hard crust all over the inside surface of the boiler. The ainly way to get it off is tae shut down the boiler, open it an' chip off the deposits wi' a chisel. Sae ye can readily see tha' we don't want tae use salt water except in an emairgency."

"I should think not," remarked Don. "But what are all those other smaller engines for, Mr. McIntosh?"

"Weel, they're for various purposes. That one mounted on the bulkhead, for instance, is the steerin' engine. The one over on the star-board side is coupled to the dynamo which furnishes us with electricity. Over on the port side are the food water pumps, and that big one below them is the bilge pump, used to clear the ship o' water if she springs a leak. That covers most of our equipment, except the injector mounted on the after bulkhead there."

"What is that for?" asked Brick.

"That is used tae inject water into the boilers in case the regular feed pumps break down. I won't try to explain how it works as I doubt if I could make it plain to ye. It's a verra handy piece of equipment sometimes, though."

"That looks like a good dynamo," observed Don. "I suppose you've got a set of storage batteries on the ship too, haven't you?"

"Yes, they're located in the stern of the ship, joost aft o' the compartment ye be sleepin' in. There's a manhole in the deck above them, an' any time ye want ye can go an' have a look at 'em."

"We'll be down there then, never fear," laughed Don. "We certainly appreciate your tellin' us all these things, Mr. McIntosh. We're

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always on the lookout for information. I hope we haven't made ourselves a nuisance."

"Dinna be afeered of that," said the engineer cordially. "Ye're a twain o' braw laddies, an' 'tis a pleasure tae tell ye things. If anythin' puzzles ye, joost let me know an' I'll explain it if I can."

The boys thanked him warmly and made their way to the deck.

"Good old scout, isn't he?" observed Teddy.

"All to the good," assented Don. "I've learned more about the workings of a ship in this half hour than I ever knew before in my life. All of which goes to show that Uncle Amos knew what he was talking about."

A steady breeze was blowing, and little white crested waves were breaking here and there over the boundless expanse of ocean. The land had vanished from sight.

The *Margaret* was making about fifteen knots an hour, dipping and rising gracefully on the long swells. The sun shone brightly, and with the salt tang of the sea air in their nostrils the boys experienced the full thrill and exhilaration of this long voyage to a distant land.

They made their way to the bow, where they found Captain Sturdy standing, holding on to a mast-stay to steady himself against the heave and roll of the vessel.

"Well, boys, how do you like this?" he asked,

with a genial smile. "Have you found your sea legs yet?"

"The motion doesn't bother me any," responded Don.

"How about you, Teddy?"

"Oh, I'm fine," responded the latter.

But his looks failed to bear out his words. The fact was that he was feeling the first twinges of seasickness, though he hated to admit it.

Captain Sturdy was a hardened sailor, and his immunity seemed to be shared by Don, who had as yet felt not the slightest touch of discomfort.

There in the bow the motion of the ship was especially noticeable. Teddy hung on gamely and stood it as long as he could. But no game-ness can prevail over seasickness, and finally Teddy made a dive for his stateroom.

"Not that I'm seasick," he protested to Don, who accompanied him to see if he could be of any service to his comrade. "I just feel as though I'd be more comfortable lying down. Don't grin, Don. Maybe you'll be feeling the same way in a little while. Probably you're groggy now, but won't admit it."

"No, I'm not, really," replied Don. "I'm sorry that you're feeling that way, Brick. But don't worry. You won't die of it."

"That's just the trouble," moaned Teddy, who was steadily growing more qualmish.

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"With this confounded thing, a fellow wants to die but can't."

"I hope it won't be so bad as that," replied Don. "The best thing you can do is to lie down and keep quiet."

"What was that your Uncle Frank was saying to you about a storm coming?" asked Teddy. "I feel that I need a storm to make me feel real good."

"Well, I'm afraid we're going to get it," admitted Don. "Uncle Frank said the captain told him that the barometer was going down and that probably there'll be a storm to-night or to-morrow. And when the old Pacific begins to kick up its heels, there's usually something doing."

"Pacific!" grunted Teddy. "Where did they ever get that name?"

"Probably because it's so different," guessed Don.

"Oh, why did I ever leave my happy home in New York for this?" groaned Teddy.

"Cheer up," chaffed Don. "Suppose I go to the galley and get you a nice tasty pork chop or something like that?"

"Get out of here before I murder you!" exclaimed Brick, and Don made a hasty exit just in time to escape a shoe hurled in his direction.

Again on deck, Don found few to keep him company, as many of the members of the ex-

pedition were in no better plight than Teddy and had discreetly retired to the privacy of their cabins, where frequent calls kept the stewards busy.

The sun, partially obscured by a haze, was shining less brightly now, and an ominous bank of clouds hung low on the horizon. The wind had freshened and had begun to whistle shrilly through the rigging. Even had he not been warned by his uncle, Don was an experienced enough sailor to know that a storm was brewing.

Members of the crew were busy fastening down every movable article on deck, under the direction of the officers, whose anxious glances wandered from the barometer to the horizon.

There was no mistaking the signs. Trouble was afoot. The giant of the gale was rousing himself from sleep. The Pacific was getting ready to belie its name by going on a rampage!

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE GRIP OF THE GALE

DARKNESS fell early as ever-thickening clouds piled up against the horizon. Big gray seas rushed toward the *Margaret*, as though bent on overpowering her, but each time she rose gallantly, shaking them off easily in a shower of spray. The wind had increased steadily in violence until it was blowing half a gale, making it impossible to face it and still breathe.

Don was driven to take shelter in the lee of the deck-house, close to the door of the wireless operator's cabin.

He had not been there long when the door opened and the radio man stepped out, a pair of earphones fastened to his head. Glancing about, he spied Don and grinned.

"Not down in your berth like a lot of the rest of them," he remarked.

"Not yet, anyway," replied Don, with a smile. "Still there's no telling when I may be a victim."

"Blowing a bit," observed the wireless operator, whose name was Tolman.

"Why, yes, just a little," grinned Don. "You couldn't exactly call it a flat calm."

"It'll get worse before it gets better," commented Tolman, as he scanned the skies. "Take it from me, I'm apt to be kept busy to-night."

"In answering signals for help or sending out calls for assistance?" asked Don, crouching down still lower in the lee of the deck-house.

"The first most likely," was the reply. "Though there's no telling but what we ourselves may get into trouble. The only thing you know about the ocean is that you don't know anything. Still, the *Margaret* is a pretty staunch vessel, and I'm not looking for trouble on our own account."

"How quickly this thing has come up," remarked Don. "At noon to-day I wouldn't have dreamed that it would get so rough by night."

"It doesn't take long for the ocean to kick up a fuss," said Tolman. "But this isn't a circumstance to what it will be a few hours from now. I guess there won't be much sleeping on board to-night. It's a cinch, anyway, that none of the officers or crew will close their eyes."

"Well, a fellow can always sleep when he can't do anything else," replied Don. "And I'd just as soon stay up awhile and see what happens. I guess the *Margaret* will ride it through all right."

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"Ten to one she will," replied the operator. "But there are a lot of coastwise craft that are anything but seaworthy, and those are the ones we're likely to hear from."

"I suppose so," agreed Don. "I think I'll go below now and get a bite to eat. Later on I'll come up and keep you company, if you don't mind."

"Glad to have you," responded the other heartily, as he vanished into his room.

Don made his way to the main cabin. There he found about half the ship's passengers assembled, seasoned sailors whose appetites nothing could disturb. Among these were Don's uncles, and they did full justice to the ample meal that graced the table. Teddy, however, was not in the dining saloon, and when Teddy was absent from the table there was no doubt that he was sick.

Don fortified himself abundantly for the coming night, and when he had finished went to visit his comrade, whom he found wholly "down and out," to use his own expression.

"I'm on the rocks, Don!" Teddy groaned, as his eyes fell on his chum. "Thrown for a row of goals! Ready for the junk heap! A total loss!"

"You're putting it pretty strongly," protested Don. "I guess there's life in the old boy yet."

"It's the only thing, then," moaned Teddy. "I've got rid of everything else."

"All the more reason you should stoke up then," pronounced Don. "How about a bit of toast and a cup of coffee? Probably you could keep that down."

"Coffee perhaps, but no toast," said the sufferer. "Make it strong and black, Don, and maybe it will keep me alive till morning."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Don. "You can't be very sick or you wouldn't care whether you died or not. Hang on for a few minutes and I'll bring you a big cup of Java."

Don was as good as his word, and soon returned with the steaming beverage. Teddy gulped it down and admitted that it made him feel better, though he emphatically refused Don's invitation to come on deck.

"Nothing doing!" he declared. "Down here I can shut my eyes so that I can't see the old ship waltzing around, but up there I'd have to keep my eyes open, and even then all I'd see would be a lot of water. That's no good. What would tickle me silly now would be to see some nice dry land."

"Well, we're just about two miles from land now," Don assured him.

"Is that so?" asked Teddy eagerly. "Bully! What's up? Is the captain going to put into port?"

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"Nothing like that. When I said two miles, I meant two miles straight down."

"Just you wait till we get ashore, I'll get even with you for that," threatened Teddy. "Haven't you any heart? The idea of springing anything of that kind on a sick fellow! You had my hopes all raised."

"It's the truth, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is, worse luck," groaned Teddy. "Let me once get out of this and I'll never kick about anything again. Even a volcano would look good to me with all the chances of falling down into it. A volcano doesn't jump around like a circus clown, anyway. This life on the rolling wave stuff is bunk—anyway, on the Pacific. It wasn't so bad on the Atlantic."

"You'd better try to go to sleep while you can, for it's not nearly as bad now as it will be by midnight," said Don. "The wireless man told me that, and he ought to know. I'm going up to talk to him now."

"Go ahead and I hope a wave gives you a good ducking. If you stay here you might be tempted to make some more bum jokes at my expense," and with this shot Teddy rolled over with a groan and buried his head in a pillow.

Don climbed up the companionway leading to the deck and stepped out. The wind had increased in violence during the short time he had been below, and now it caught him with such

force that he was blown hard against the rail and had to clutch it tightly to keep from going over the side.

He stood for a moment trying to get his breath and take stock of the situation. The clouds had blotted out all trace of moon and stars. The only light outside of that furnished by those of the ship was the ghastly phosphorescence that gave an uncanny luster to the waves. The vessel was headed into the wind that shrieked through and over it like a chorus of lost souls.

Great sheets of spray were flying across the deck, and Don ducked below faster than he had come up, to go in search of his oilskins.

Arrayed in these, he made the deck once more, though this time with vastly more caution. Tacking along the slippery surface by the aid of stanchions or any fixed object that happened to be within reach, he sought and finally reached the door to the wireless cabin.

This was closed, but at his knock there came a cordial "come in" from the occupant, and he stepped inside.

"I see you're in full evening dress," said Tolman, with a grin, as he surveyed his visitor's oilskins.

"The latest thing for storm functions," laughed Don, as he unbuttoned the coat.

"Just the thing at any rate that you need

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to-night," was the rejoinder. "Well, what do you think of the dust-up? I'm not such a bad little weather prophet, am I?"

"You're all wool and a yard wide," agreed Don. "What's doing on the wireless? Heard any distress signals so far this evening?"

"Not yet, and I hope I won't. It would be some job to help any vessel in a storm like this. So far, the air has been pretty quiet. It's—wait a minute!"

There was sudden excitement in his voice as he held up his hand for silence.

For a moment Don could hear nothing. Then he caught a faint buzzing in the earphones clasped over the operator's head.

He waited in breathless silence while the wireless man grabbed a pad of paper and a pencil and rapidly scribbled some notes and figures.

Then Tolman reached for his key and blue flames began to sputter as he swiftly sent an answering message.

This done, he tore the earphones from his head and turned toward Don.

"That was an S O S call from a coastwise schooner," he explained. "They have only a small set on board that can't reach far, and from the directions they tried to give I don't think they can be many miles away."

"Are they in a bad fix?" asked Don, stirred

by a possible impending tragedy of the sea.

"Their ship has sprung a leak and is sinking fast," replied Tolman. "They shut off before I could get all the details. Will you take this paper to the captain right away? In the meantime I'll send and listen in and try to get some more information about their position."

"Sure thing," replied Don, only too glad to be of service in any possible way he could in such a dire emergency as this seemed to be.

He was off like a shot, holding on to stays and whatever promised support and safety against the tearing force of the gale, which seemed to be trying to grip him in its malignant fingers and make him its victim.

He fought his way to the bridge, where he found the captain, who looked at him in some surprise when he saw that he was one of the passengers.

"What is this?" he asked, as he took the scrap of paper from Don's extended hand.

"A message from the wireless room, sir," answered Don, his voice almost stifled by the power of the wind that seemed trying to ram his words down his throat.

The captain read the message by the light of the binnacle. Then he pressed a button that set the engine room bells to jangling and gave a terse order to the steersman.

The beat of the engines grew faster, the *Mar-*

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garet described a curve and set off to the aid of the disabled schooner.

Don made his way back to the wireless room where he found the operator again jotting down notes.

"I've got all the dope now," he announced. "They're pumping as hard as they know how and think they can keep their ship afloat an hour or two longer. I'm going on the bridge to report to the captain, but I'll be back soon. Make yourself at home while I'm gone."

The door slammed behind him and Don had time to look about the snug little room. It was packed with radio apparatus in every nook and corner. At any other time, Don would have liked nothing better than to inspect all of this fascinating outfit. But just now he was too excited about the S O S call to think of anything else.

When the operator did not return after a few minutes, Don grew restless and went out on deck.

He strained his eyes through the dense darkness, but could see only an endless waste of tumbling, hissing water. On her new course, the *Margaret* was more in the trough than she had been and she rolled in a terrifying fashion. Looking at her masts, it seemed to Don at times as though they were going to dip into the sea. Each time she righted herself, however, shook

off the seas that came crashing down on her deck, and resumed her gallant battle with wind and waves.

An hour went by, and still Don could catch no glimpse of the sinking vessel.

Then above the roar of the gale he heard a shout from the bridge and felt the engines slow down. A few moments later he could make out the red sidelight of a vessel and note from this how close her deck was to the water.

A flare sprang up on the deck of the *Margaret* and its brilliant light revealed a spectacle that thrilled Don with horror!

CHAPTER IX

A DARING RESCUE

OUTLINED by the weird light of the glowing flare, a foundering vessel stood out as distinct and clear as an etching against the black night beyond.

She was badly listed to port and down at the head and so low in the water that it was evident to the onlookers that her final plunge to the bottom could not be long delayed.

"I guess we didn't get here a minute too soon," came a voice beside Don, and looking up he saw the figure of the wireless operator bending over the rail for a clearer look.

"I should say not!" replied Don. "The question is whether we have got here soon enough. That boat looks as though she might go down at any moment."

At the rail of the sinking vessel, on the side nearer the *Margaret*, the crew were standing, gaunt and wild-eyed. They had worked at the pumps until exhausted and now were frantic to grasp their last hope of safety.

"Wonder if they haven't got a small boat of

their own," said Don, as his eyes scanned the vessel fore and aft.

"There's one hanging at the side there, but it has been smashed by the waves," replied Tolman. "What help they get must come from us."

"I don't see how any small boat could live in that sea anyway," said Don, as he looked at the waves that were running mountain high.

"Trust our sailors to see to that," replied Tolman confidently. "It's astonishing what they can do with a mere cockle shell, let alone the staunch boats that the *Margaret* carries."

The captain had called for volunteers to man the boat, and not a man held back. Captain Maitland selected six of the best oarsmen, and with the dexterity of trained seamen they lowered a boat on the lee side, being protected thus to some extent from the force of the wind and waves by the vessel itself. The launching was successfully accomplished, and then, followed by the hopes and unspoken prayers of those who remained behind, the men bent to the oars and pulled away with a will.

But as soon as the little craft crept out of the shelter of the parent vessel it caught the full force of the raging tempest and it seemed inevitable that it would be swamped. It seemed for a moment as helpless as a chip in the surface of Niagara.

Don's heart was in his mouth as the tiny boat

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rose to the top of a giant wave and then slid down into the yawning gulf beneath.

"They'll never make it!" he cried, in an agony of apprehension.

"Yes, they will," declared Tolman. "I've seen them in seas just as bad and they pulled through. Just watch those boys!"

His prophecy was justified. The rowers stuck to their task with grim determination, and by sheer force of muscle and sinew drove their craft slowly but surely in the direction of the doomed vessel. Crested waves broke over them, when for a moment the boat was swept into the trough, drenching them to the skin and threatening to swamp the craft. More than once, two of the men had to drop their oars and bail for life while the others fought to keep the boat head on to the seas.

Battling with every ounce of strength and courage in them, the rowers at last accomplished the seemingly impossible feat, and finally drew in under the lee of the sinking schooner.

As it did so, one of the men of the doomed vessel jumped on the rail and poised himself to leap into the boat. Had he done so at the moment he might have swamped the boat or injured some of the rescuers.

But the next instant the captain of the schooner seized him and yanked him back with

such force that he measured his length on the deck.

"Good stuff!" muttered Tolman. "There's some discipline on that boat."

The captain, to prevent any others from following the example of the panic-stricken sailor, seized a belaying pin and flourished it in the faces of the rest of the crew to enforce his orders. He was a big man and evidently accustomed to making himself obeyed, for the crew shrank back and the threatened panic was averted.

Then the captain stood at the side and one by one passed the others into the boat. He did this quietly but quickly, for every second now was precious. At any moment the schooner might sink, and unless they could get clear of her before that happened all would be sucked down in the whirlpool her sinking would create.

Some tense and terrible moments passed, terrible not only to those most directly concerned but also to those who breathlessly watched the gallant work from the decks of the *Margaret*. But at last it was successfully accomplished.

But the return trip threatened to be doubly perilous, for with the rescued men added to its load, the little boat lay dangerously low in the water. Still, there had been no alternative. There was no time to take part of the men and

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then come back for the rest. All had to be saved at once.

At the word of command, the oarsmen now pulled away with a will, for none knew better than they the danger of being close to the vessel when she sank. As some compensation for the extra load, the wind, which had been against them at the start, was now in their favor. Still that had its drawbacks, for waves coming over the stern were far more difficult to avoid than those that they were able to face.

"So far, so good!" exclaimed Don, with a great sigh of relief. "Half of the work is over anyway."

"Not quite," warned Tolman. "By far the harder half is yet to come."

The little boat labored through the seas with waves crashing against it continually and threatening at any moment to engulf it. Sometimes it disappeared from view entirely, and a great gasp went up from the onlookers. But each time it reappeared, some of the men laboring to bail it out and the others pulling at the oars until it seemed that their arms would be torn from their sockets.

They had not got a hundred feet away from the sinking craft when the vessel rose on end, gave a great lurch, and disappeared from sight.

"Another recruit for Davy Jones," mur-

mured Tolman, as he gazed at the maelstrom left in her wake.

"Thank heaven that the men got away from her in time!" murmured Don fervently.

On came the weary rowers with death staring them in the eyes and threatening to seize them every moment. The raging waters were only a few inches below the gunwale of the heavily laden boat, and at times they rose in sheer green walls on every side that almost seemed to meet above it.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, the boat came nearer to the *Margaret*. The rowers were within a hundred feet of the vessel when one of the men gave a cry and pointed astern.

The others looked and their hearts sank.

Looming up to the very sky, it seemed, was a huge rushing comber, its crest swirling and seething, curling over like a great claw to grip them!

CHAPTER X

QUICK WORK

IT seemed as though Death had tired of threatening and were determined to make an end of it.

On came the giant comber while the rowers strove desperately to reach the *Margaret* before it should arrive.

Don, bending far over the rail, watched with straining eyes the struggle against overwhelming odds.

He saw the huge roller bearing down, and realized instantly that the boat would never reach the vessel before the wave caught it. His heart sank at his apparent helplessness to aid the imperiled men.

His eyes roved about the deck and fell on a coil of stout new hemp rope lying near the deck-house.

Like a flash a scheme entered his mind, and at the same instant he sprang into action.

Seizing one end of the rope, he made it fast to a cleat on deck. Then he lifted the other end of the coil and looked for the boat.

The little craft had already been caught by the giant wave, and was rushing with terrific force past the stern of the *Margaret*. The rowers, powerless to control their craft in the grip of that mighty wave, had shipped their oars, and all were staring hopelessly at the *Margaret*, so close to them and yet so far beyond their reach.

For a fleeting moment the boat stood out hard and clear against the mountain of water behind it, and in that second Don heaved the coil of rope with all his strength toward the little craft.

The stout line flickered out, straightened, and with the accuracy of a shotline fell across the boat.

All but one of the men in her seemed too paralyzed with a sense of their impending doom to move. All but the big captain of the sunken schooner.

With actions as quick as Don's had been, he caught the rope just as it was slipping away and snubbed it about the post in the bow of the boat. A few deft passes, and the rope was secured beyond the chance of slipping.

All this took but a few seconds. The rope had barely been fastened when the crest of the wave descended with a crash on the boat, completely engulfing it.

Part of the wave washed clear over the

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Margaret herself, sweeping across her decks with tremendous force. Engulfed in the green flood, Don clung to the rail for dear life.

For what seemed an age, the water swirled over and about him. When it seemed that he could not hold his breath and his grip on the rail a moment longer, the force of the wave spent itself, and as the water sluiced off the decks on every side Don shook his head clear and looked for some sign of the boat and its occupants.

He saw first the rope straining taut, and knew by this that the boat must still be at the end of it.

As the wave subsided the little craft appeared bottom side up, a mere dot on the storm-lashed waters. But men clung to her keel and sides and some to the rope that had proved their salvation.

Willing hands on board the *Margaret* hauled them close in under the lee of the vessel while others slid down the rope and passed up the half-drowned men from the overturned boat.

In a few minutes they were all safe on deck, and by what seemed almost a miracle not one had lost his hold and been swept away. Thanks to Don's quick action, the monster wave had been cheated of its prey.

The rescued men were taken down into the

engine room where they dried their clothes and consumed vast amounts of hot, black coffee.

Don's part in the rescue was quickly made known by Tolman, who had been an eye-witness and was enthusiastic over Don's quickness of thought and action.

Captain Maitland came up to him and grasped his hand.

"That was a mighty fine bit of work on your part, my boy," he said. "I haven't any son of my own, but if I had I'd want him to be of your type."

"Oh, it wasn't much that I did," protested Don, flushing with embarrassment. "The rope happened to be near and I grabbed it."

The captain looked at him quizzically.

"Well," he said, "I'm mighty glad that the rope was near you, but I'm more glad that you were near the rope."

The commendations, however, that Don treasured most came from his uncles.

"Fine work, my boy, fine work!" ejaculated Captain Sturdy, as he clapped him on the shoulder. "It was one of the best examples of quick thinking and quick action that I've ever known of."

"I only wish that his father could be here," said Professor Bruce, his eyes beaming with pride and affection.

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The coming of the giant wave seemed to mark the climax of the storm, and shortly afterward the gale began to moderate and the seas gradually subsided, although for two days following the *Margaret* had rough going as she traveled northward.

The morning after the rescue Teddy had so far recovered that he was able to eat light meals, and after that his appetite grew by leaps and bounds.

"Richard is himself again," he murmured at the first meal to which he was able to do full justice.

"I notice that," replied Don, with a grin. "When you can gorge a dinner that would do credit to an elephant I know that you've got back to normal."

"When I do a thing, I like to do it right," declared Teddy.

"Sure," agreed Don. "Sick or well, you do things thoroughly. When it comes to holding down a bunk during a storm you have few equals and no superiors."

"I sure did wear the championship belt for that," admitted Teddy. "But I guess I've got seasickness out of my system now for good and all."

"I guess so," comforted Don. "When the next storm comes along, you'll probably be able to laugh at it."

"All the same, I hope it will wait until after we get to Alaska," said Teddy. "If we've got to be shipwrecked, I want to see the Land of Volcanoes first."

"Land of Volcanoes, hey?" came a gruff voice from behind them. "Who wants to see dat place? We didn't sign on for no trip to see volcanoes."

Don and Teddy whirled about to face the sneering countenance of one of the men who had been rescued from the sinking schooner.

The man was evidently of foreign birth, probably a Russian by nationality, for his flat nose and high cheekbones were distinctly of Tatar origin. He was built like a gorilla, big and bulky, his arms covered with hair. His face had a sinister look and his eyes were evil. He was known to his shipmates by the name of Joshki.

He had evidently been listening to the conversation of the boys, and had not hesitated to interrupt them with his ill-tempered remark.

"It seems to me you shouldn't be worrying much where you are going," replied Don, his distaste for the man growing as he looked him over. "You're pretty lucky to be here at all, instead of being down in Davy Jones' locker."

"Dat's all right, but we don't want to take no trip up to de Nort' Pole. We got to stay on

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board dis old hooker, an' we don't get no pay for it."

"You don't expect to be paid for having your life saved, do you?" asked Teddy.

"If you have any complaints to make why don't you make them to the captain?" asked Don.

"You guys ain't too good to be talked to, are you?" growled the man belligerently.

"Not at all," replied Don. "All the same, I think you ought to be glad that you're alive instead of growling about the people that saved you."

The man muttered something the boys could not catch, cast an ugly look at them, and shuffled away.

"That fellow's the kind that would never be satisfied with anything," declared Teddy. "Give him a sandwich, and he'd kick because it wasn't apple pie. Gee, Don, what a face he's got! How would you like to meet him at night in a dark alley?"

"I'd want the alley to be very dark—so dark that he couldn't see me," laughed Don. "But as this isn't very likely to happen, I guess we can dismiss Mr. Joshki from our calculations."

But Joshki refused to be dismissed.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE TRAIL OF A THIEF

"TEDDY, do you know that we have a thief on board?" asked Don on the following afternoon, as they rose from the dining table and went out on deck.

"You don't say so!" replied Teddy. "Where's the telephone? Call up the police and have the man arrested."

"Stop your kidding," replied Don. "I'm in dead earnest. A lot of the passengers have been missing things and they're all upset about it."

"I'll have to look after my diamond rings and pearl necklaces!" exclaimed Teddy in simulated alarm. "I don't want to be a victim of the crime wave."

"You'll be a victim of something else if you don't talk sense," declared Don, making a pass at him.

"I hope your uncles haven't lost anything," said Teddy, subsiding to a more serious tone of voice.

"Not yet, but there's no knowing when they

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may," replied Don. "Several of the scientific party have lost things of considerable value. Doctor Ellis has missed a watch, Doctor Geikie has been robbed of a scarf-pin, and Mr. Thompson has found some bank-bills gone from a drawer in his cabin."

"I wonder who the light-fingered gentleman is," mused Teddy. "It's out of the question of course that any of the passengers can be guilty."

"That goes without saying," agreed Don. "They're all people of the highest character, and there can't be a breath of suspicion against them. And the same is true of the officers of the ship. It must be some member of the crew."

"Not necessarily," said Teddy. "Remember that there are other sailor men than the crew aboard just now."

"That's so!" exclaimed Don. "The men from the shipwrecked schooner! I hadn't thought of them. But it hardly seems possible that any of them would rob the people of the ship that picked them up and saved them from drowning."

"Oh, I don't know," said Teddy skeptically. "There are some people who would rob their own mother. We don't know anything about these fellows. And there's one of them at least that I'm ready to believe would do anything."

"You mean that rough-neck that was talking to us last night?" asked Don.

"That's the one, that Joshki fellow," replied Teddy. "I'd sooner believe it of him than of any one else. Haven't you noticed that all the sailors of the *Margaret* steer clear of him? Even his own comrades don't seem to want to have anything to do with him."

"I guess he's a bad egg all right," mused Don. "He was the one that was going to jump into the boat that night when his captain yanked him back. Still, of course, he may be rough and brutal without being a thief, you know."

"Sure," agreed Teddy. "And I wouldn't say anything to any one else about it. I don't want to see any harm come to him if he doesn't deserve it. But my own private hunch is that if the thief is ever found he'll turn out to be the man."

Perhaps the man who was most worried about the matter was Captain Maitland. As the master of the vessel, he felt the responsibility for everything that took place on board. The repeated complaints of the passengers, ever growing in volume, put him very much on edge.

Most of the members of his own crew were picked men and had sailed with him for years. He hated to believe that any of them could be

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guilty of the thefts. Still, he took nothing for granted, and kept a sharp eye on all of them. His officers also kept them under sharp surveillance while avoiding any appearance of doing so. But nothing turned up to justify suspicion in that quarter.

The thief must therefore be looked for among the men rescued from the sinking schooner. The captain noted that complaints had not started until after these had been taken on board.

Constant vigilance, however, failed to discover the thief, who was either unusually crafty or exceptionally lucky. Captain Maitland fumed and fretted, but to no avail. And the constant irritation made him more eager than ever to get rid of his enforced guests and thereby probably be freed from the presence of the culprit.

He would have gladly put the men on a southward bound steamer, had he sighted one, but he was not so fortunate. The addition to the personnel made crowded quarters in the fore-castle. There was not enough work to keep them all busy, and the captain knew that idle men were apt to become discontented and impart their restlessness to the crew.

There seemed to be nothing he could do about it, however, until they reached Alaska. There he proposed to outfit the men with enough

money and provisions to take them to the nearest settlement, after which his responsibility would be ended.

"Where did you get that knife?" asked Don of his comrade the next morning as they were sauntering about the deck.

"Haven't you ever seen that before?" asked Teddy. "That's a present the King of England gave me the last time I had a chat with his royal nibs."

"How long ago was that?" asked Don, with a look of interest on his face.

"Oh, a couple of years ago," replied Teddy airily.

"So King Edward gave you this?" asked Don, taking the knife that had a glittering brass handle, polished so that it shone like gold in the sun.

"That's right," replied Teddy. "Though I used to call him Ed when I was talking with him."

"That's queer," remarked Don, "for King Edward died a good many years ago, if you'll remember."

"Oh, yes," said Teddy, not turning a hair. "I meant his son Henry, the one I used to call Hen, old top."

"You'd better change your brand of dope," laughed Don. "The present king's name is George."

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"I guess you've got me," replied Teddy, grinning. "I won this old thing in a raffle, and I suppose it isn't worth fifty cents. The blades are not much more than tin, but the handle takes a mighty fine polish. I got some stuff from McIntosh yesterday and rubbed it up just for want of something better to do."

Their walk had brought them in the vicinity of Joshki, who was sprawling at his ease alongside a coil of rope.

"Let's take a better look at that gold knife of yours," said Don.

Teddy passed it over, and as the sun's rays struck it, the boys could see Joshki stiffen and cast a hungry look at the resplendent knife. He started as though to say something, then changed his mind and quickly turned his gaze away.

"Did you see that look of Joshki?" asked Don, as the boys moved on.

"Sure, I did," replied Teddy. "I wonder if the fellow really thought it was worth anything."

"Possibly," replied Don. "It certainly looks like the real thing. What a joke it would be on him if he really tried to steal it."

The incident passed from their thoughts, and when Teddy went below to brush up for dinner he laid the knife on his dresser table and forgot all about it.

Their cabin had a skylight in the deck above it, through which could be seen what was going on below. A curtain could be drawn across it to secure privacy when desired, but throughout the day the boys usually drew the curtain aside so that the room could be flooded by the warm sunshine.

That afternoon Don was loitering near the skylight, and as he glanced down carelessly he noted Teddy's knife lying on the dresser, gleaming like molten gold in the sun.

"Lucky it isn't gold," he said to himself, "or it would be a mighty careless thing to leave it in sight."

At this moment Joshki passed him, shuffling aft with a pile of plates. These he carried down into the main cabin.

Don remembered the incident of the morning that associated the man with the knife. One of his intuitions came to him. He beckoned to Teddy, who hastened to his side.

"What's up?" asked Teddy.

"Nothing that I know of just now," said Don. "I just have a feeling that there's going to be. Hang around."

Teddy by experience had come to have a wholesome respect for what he called his friend's hunches, and obeyed. At the same moment Captain Sturdy came up to them and stopped for a few words.

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“What are you conspirators doing?” he asked, with a smile.

“Don has a hunch that something is going to happen—” began Teddy.

“It is happening!” broke in Don. “Look!”

They stared wonderingly and saw the state-room door move. It gave slowly and Joshki stole in.

CHAPTER XII

CAUGHT RED-HANDED

THE Russian glanced swiftly around, snatched the knife from the dresser, and turned to leave the room.

As though moved by a spring, the three watchers dashed for the nearest stairs and rushed down them so fast that they caught Joshki just as he closed the door of the state-room behind him.

The fellow started back in dismay, and then, seeing himself trapped, darted for the door leading into the after compartment.

He was not quick enough, however, for Captain Sturdy in two strides was there before him. The man tried to dash past him, but the captain caught him by the collar and brought him up standing. He struggled violently to get away, but in Captain Sturdy's herculean grip he was powerless.

"Caught with the goods!" exclaimed the captain grimly. "You'll take the rest of the trip in irons for this, my man."

Joshki, seeing that he could not break away, tried to brazen it out.

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"What de matter wit you?" he growled truculently. "I ain't done nothin'. Let me go."

"Put your hand in his coat pocket, Don," directed his uncle. "See if you can find the knife."

Don did as commanded and promptly produced the article in question.

"How did that knife get into your pocket?" queried Don's uncle, not relaxing his iron grip. "Just fell in by accident, I suppose?"

"Don't know nuttin' about it," growled Joshki, and then, turning sullen, refused to say another word.

They marched their prisoner up to Captain Maitland. That personage listened to the account of the capture and then examined the knife.

"Why, this isn't gold!" he exclaimed. "It's just cheap brass polished up."

"Not golt?" cried Joshki, breaking his silence. "Sure dat's golt. I heard dis young feller tellin' the udder one dat it was golt."

"We were joking about it this morning," explained Don, with a laugh. "Kidding each other about its being the gift of the King of England, and this fellow overheard it and thought it must be worth a lot."

Joshki shot a venomous glance at the two boys, as though they had been the cause of his

undoing instead of his own criminal action. He realized however that his thieving was over for this trip.

The captain of the *Margaret* called two of his men to him.

"Take this fellow away," he commanded. "Lock him up in the brig and see that a good watch is kept over him. Mr. Hughes," he added, turning to his first officer, "have this man's bunk thoroughly searched and report the results to me."

Joshki was dragged away none too gently by the sailors, some of whom had suffered by his depredations. The search of his bunk was fruitful. In a hole of the wall was found all the stolen valuables belonging to members of the expedition.

Captain Sturdy and the boys came in for a vote of thanks for having captured the thief. There was much laughter over the "gold" knife, which remained on exhibition until its splendid luster had deteriorated into the hue of the common brass it was.

With the tension caused by the mysterious thefts removed, the *Margaret* steamed steadily northward, favored with good weather, until one day the boys were delighted to learn that the next morning would probably see them at their destination.

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"How far is the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes from the coast?" inquired Don of Professor Bruce.

"About fifty miles," was the answer.

"That's nothing at all!" exclaimed Don.

"We ought to make it in a day or two," put in Brick.

The professor looked at them with a smile.

"This isn't an auto trip over good roads," he reminded them.

"You'll be singing, 'It's a long, long road to Tipperary' before you reach the valley. You'll have more ups and downs than an elevator man," added Captain Sturdy.

"Where do we land?" asked Don.

"At a place called Geographic Harbor," was the professor's answer. "We sail through the Shelikov Strait and go through an arm of Amalik Bay in an area that up to a little while ago was supposed to be dry land. The harbor has only been discovered very recently, but it's said to be a good one."

Despite his declaration that he was going to forget the Harrington matter, Don found it impossible to do so. His father was very dear to him and the thought of the anxiety he was undergoing through the machinations of an oily rascal made Don's heart sore and wrathful.

How full his mind was of the subject was indicated that evening, when he found Brick try-

ing to work out a cross-word puzzle in an old newspaper.

"Don," said Teddy, looking up, "what word is it that means 'skunk' in sixteen letters?"

"Dwight Harrington!" said Don bitterly.

"Right-o!" cried Teddy. "Gee, I hope your dad gets the best of that family."

"So do I," returned Don wistfully.

There was little sleeping on board the *Margaret* that night. Everybody was in a fever of excitement at the approaching end of their long sea journey and engrossed in a multitude of details connected with the land trip.

There were to be three parties. The two Sturdys with Professor Bruce and Teddy constituted one. Another consisted of the Government scientists, whose route deviated from that marked out by Captain Sturdy. The third comprised the sailors who had been rescued from the schooner, under the direction of their captain.

Joshki had been freed by Captain Maitland and placed in the custody of his former captain, who promised that unless he redeemed himself by good conduct he should be punished for his offenses on reaching civilization.

As the charts of the coast were not wholly to be relied on and as Captain Maitland had never been to Alaska before, the *Margaret* had to steam along with exceeding care until the chan-

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nel was found. Then the vessel was headed into the narrow passage and felt her way along until she emerged into the beautiful and capacious harbor she was seeking.

The boys scanned the coast with wide-open eyes that glittered with excitement. Here was Alaska, the wonderful country, a large part of which was still an uncharted wilderness waiting for the footsteps of the adventurous pioneer. And away off in the distance they saw a mounting haze that was not clouds.

"Yes," remarked Captain Sturdy, answering the boys' unspoken question, "that vapor rises from the volcanoes and the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. It won't be long before your eyes rest on the Eighth Wonder of the World."

"Greater than all the other seven, if the reports we have heard of it are true," added Professor Bruce, who was standing by his side, his eyes riveted on that mounting column in the distance.

Their own landing took but a few minutes, but it was several hours before all their baggage and supplies could be taken from the vessels. Still more time was consumed in dividing the supplies into packs that could be carried on the shoulders of the various members of the party.

The men from the sunken schooner, having less to arrange than the others, were off first

on their way to a fishing village, where they were to wait until they could ship a passage home.

As they passed Don's party, Joshki, who brought up the rear, glared at Don with malignity.

"You wait!" he hissed, as he shook his fist. "You hear from me again some day! I get even wit you! I **make** you sorry! Joshki never forget!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE MONSTER'S FOOTPRINT

DON laughed good-naturedly at the Russian's vengeful promise.

"Threatened men live long," he remarked to Teddy, as he went on arranging his pack.

"All the same, it may be well to keep our eyes peeled," responded Brick. "If ever hate looked out from a man's eyes it did from his. I don't think the fellow would stop at anything."

"Likely enough he wouldn't," agreed Don carelessly. "But we've probably seen him for the last time, so why should we worry? Give me a lift with this pack, will you, and then I'll help you up with yours."

In a little while they were ready to start.

"Now, boys," said Captain Sturdy, who had given himself a load heavier than that of any of the others, "we're off on the Katmai Trail, and there's no need of my telling you, for you'll soon find out for yourself, that it's mighty hard going."

"If it's a regular trail, I should think it ought to be pretty well beaten down," remarked Teddy.

"It was before the eruption," replied the captain. "It was used regularly by the natives on their hunting trips. But since the volcano blew off, everything is changed. The old paths have been covered with ashes, in some places to a depth of a hundred feet. The natives give the place a wide berth, and what few exploring parties have been here have had to make their own paths by the aid of some of the old landmarks, just as we'll have to do. Part of the way will be through ashes, part through snow, and part through a nice slushy combination of both."

"At any rate we'll have variety," said Don cheerfully, not at all daunted by the outlook.

"I don't see any snow just now," remarked Teddy, as his eyes swept the landscape.

"Not yet," said the captain. "But you'll see plenty of it when we get into the higher places. And most of the way it will be under your feet anyway, although there's a coating of ashes above it that hides it from view. Most of it stays there all the year around, because the ashes keep the sun from getting at it and melting it."

They started out, Captain Sturdy in advance, and in accordance with his directions marched in Indian file, keeping as closely as possible in his footsteps.

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"I'll have to pick the path," he said, "because it's treacherous going. In places, what seems solid ground is only the top of a snow arch covered with ash, and if you went through you might fall into a stream of hot water that has hollowed out the snowbank, so that there is only a thin crust over it."

The thought of such a sudden disappearance made the boys' blood tingle with the sense of adventure. Here at the very beginning of their trip was a hidden danger, one of the many that promised to make this a trip long to be remembered.

"How does he know that he won't go through himself?" asked Teddy in a low voice of Don, as they toiled along. "He's never been here before, has he?"

"No," replied Don. "But he's done so much exploring in all parts of the world that I suppose he has developed an instinct for sensing danger and avoiding it. A thing that would be Greek to us is as easy for him to read as a child's primer would be. He feels danger even before he sees it. Trust him to pick out the best and safest path."

"I'll stick closer to him than a brother," was Teddy's wise conclusion.

Their confidence was justified with every mile they covered. Never once did Captain Sturdy seem mystified or at a loss. He was like a

master chess player with the board spread out before him, knowing intuitively what was the best move to make next.

"You might think he was just taking a little stroll through the streets of Hillville," remarked Teddy, a little later. "You'd think he was following a beaten path."

"He's a dabster, all right," returned Don. "What Uncle Frank can't do isn't worth doing."

"I wish he could invent some way of carrying a pack so that it wouldn't seem to be getting heavier all the time," observed his chum. "When we started, this pack weighed forty pounds. Now I think it weighs a hundred, and I hate to think what it will mount up to by the time we pitch camp."

"Probably about a ton," laughed Don. "I think we'll stop pretty soon, though, for rest and for something to eat. Maybe it won't seem so heavy after that."

They plodded on for another hour, however, before Captain Sturdy called a halt.

"How does it feel to carry a pack?" he asked, eyeing the boys quizzically. "Not quite as easy as the life on shipboard, is it? Or on camel-back?"

"Not so that you could notice it," grinned Don, as he eased the pack from his aching shoulders. "It won't be so hard when we get

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used to it. The first day I suppose is always the toughest."

"Right," said his uncle. "And I'm glad to see that you boys have started out like thorough-breds. It's been a pretty stiff test, but I haven't heard a yelp or a whine from either of you. Now we'll rest for an hour or so and have something to eat. Then we'll hike along again till dark, for your Uncle Amos and I want to cover so much ground to-day that we'll get to Mount Katmai before to-morrow night."

They made a hearty meal from some of the provisions they had brought along, and then sat resting for a while before resuming their journey, the boys' eyes roving with curiosity over the unfamiliar landscape.

"Every tree I've seen so far is a dead one," remarked Don, as he looked at the stripped black trunks that seemed like so many shafts of charcoal.

"Just like a forest of ghosts," commented Teddy.

"That's the only kind you will see for some time, until we get beyond the range of the eruption," replied Professor Bruce. "That wiped out the life of everything within its reach. In many cases, it burned the trees level with the ground and even ate up the roots. In others, it left part of the trunks standing, but with all the life burned out of them."

"Of course the plants and flowers had no chance," remarked Don.

"No," replied the professor. "They were victims too. But you'll see new patches of them from time to time pushing their heads above the ground. Certain varieties seem to find in the ash itself the things that make them grow."

"I've been looking for traces of lava," said Don. "I thought the ground would be covered with a kind of hard rock, formed by the lava streams when they cooled off."

"So you would in the neighborhood of most volcanoes," replied the professor. "But that's one of the curious features of this special eruption. No doubt when Mount Katmai blew the top of its head off it sent up at the same time millions of tons of lava. At first this was in liquid form, but when it reached the upper air the expansion of the gases in it scattered it into atoms that took the form of incandescent particles, a sort of burning ash that was carried on the wind for hundreds of miles, darkening the sky, blasting everything in its path, and settling down in drifts, sometimes hundreds of feet deep."

"It must have been a wonderful sight to see," exclaimed Don.

"Wonderful, but at the same time fearful," replied the professor. "The one man that is known to have seen it, a native, was scared so

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out of his wits that he'd probably be running yet if his legs hadn't given out. Luckily he was out of the direct range of it, and finally reached his native village, but he was so frightened that he isn't able yet to remember many of the details of it."

"It's a bit of luck," put in the captain, "that it took place in a comparatively uninhabited part of the world. Otherwise, it might have been another Martinique where the burning gas swept down from Mount Pelée and snuffed out the lives of twenty-five thousand people so quickly that most of them didn't have time to know what had happened."

"Let's hope that old Katmai doesn't go on another spree while we're up here," remarked Teddy.

"It isn't likely," returned the professor. "But there are other volcanoes here, lots of them, and we may yet see a fireworks display that will beat any Fourth of July you have ever seen. But now I guess we'd better be moving, hadn't we, Frank?"

They set out again, refreshed by their brief rest. They had trudged for about half an hour when the captain came to a sudden halt.

"Look here!" he exclaimed, as he unslung his pack and grasped his rifle.

The others hurried to his side.

There on the ground before them were the plainly marked footprints of some huge animal.

"Gee, it looks like the track of an elephant!" gasped Teddy.

"No," replied Captain Sturdy, as he looked around in every direction. "It's the track of a bear! A big Alaskan bear!"

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE VERGE OF THE CRATER

“A BEAR?” exclaimed Don in amazement. “Why, I didn’t think there was a bear in the world that could make a track like that. It looks as though it were a foot square.”

“It amounts to a little more than that,” said Professor Bruce. “I should say that it’s about sixteen inches long and ten inches wide. It’s like that of some prehistoric monster.”

“There’s only one kind of bear that could make it,” pronounced the captain, “and that’s the kodiak bear that’s found only in Alaska. Compared to him, the grizzly and the polar bear are little more than cubs.”

“Do you think we have any chance of finding this fellow?” asked Don eagerly, his eyes sparkling at the prospect of a hunt.

Captain Sturdy examined the tracks carefully.

“I’m afraid not,” he answered. “These tracks are several hours old. We can see for miles here in every direction. He’s not in sight, and there’s no place where he could hide. He’s probably making his way to the woods that

lie beyond the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes. No, we can't go after him now, but we may see the gentleman later."

"Let's hope that we see him first," put in Teddy, with a grin.

"That would be just as well," assented the captain. "The kodiak bear is mighty bad medicine. If we get close to him, it will simply be a question of his life or ours. I'm glad anyway that we came across this footprint. In the first place, it assures me that I'll have a chance to get what I came up here to seek. In the second place, it has given us a tip that it will be just as well that one of us should be on guard at night in case one of these fellows should come sniffing around camp."

They took up their packs again and moved on, keeping a sharp lookout on every side, but no bear came in sight. When at last the twilight began to gather about them they pitched their camp on the top of a hill and threw off their packs with a sigh of heartfelt relief.

"I guess we've earned our suppers," remarked Don to Teddy, as they busied themselves with getting out the material for their meal after the tent poles had been pegged down.

"If we haven't, no one ever did," declared Brick emphatically. "It's the hardest day's work I ever did in my life. I'm one big ache all over."

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Their supper consisted of biscuit, canned meat and beans, with the welcome adjunct of hot coffee that they had brought with them in thermos bottles.

"The best coffee that you'll taste until we get back to civilization," remarked Professor Bruce, as he sipped his own quota. "So you'd better make the most of it."

"Why, I thought you had a lot of coffee in the supplies!" said Don, in some surprise.

"So we have," responded the professor. "But when we brew our own it will taste a bit different from this that was made on the *Margaret*."

"Why is that?" asked Brick.

"Because of the kind of water we'll have to use," Captain Sturdy explained. "All the water of this region is full of sand and ashes. Of course, we'll filter it before using, but we can't get entirely rid of the grit. In fact, you won't enjoy even washing your faces in the streams, for they'll feel stickier after washing than they did before."

"Oh, we got used to sand in our grub when we were out on the Sahara," replied Teddy.

"I suppose we'll have to depend on this canned stuff for most of our food," observed Don.

"For a while, yes," replied Captain Sturdy. "But we can mix in other things with the deli-

catessen as soon as we get to the streams and woods. There's no end of fowl in the forests and there are plenty of fish in the lakes and rivers. Trout, big fellows, two or three feet long, that are so unused to man that they'll snap at the hook as soon as you throw it in. Oh, we'll be living on the fat of the land before long."

"And perhaps," added Don, with a smile, "we'll have some bear steaks thrown in for good measure."

"I hope so," replied the captain. "Though I'm more interested in getting the bear's hide than his steaks. All the same, they make mighty good eating. But speaking of bears reminds me that we must set a guard. Suppose, Amos, I watch for the first half of the night and you for the second."

"That suits me," replied the professor.

"But we ought to take a turn too," protested Don, and Teddy nodded in agreement.

"Not this time," replied the captain. "You boys have had a hard day of it and need your sleep. We old stagers don't mind so much the loss of rest."

He would take no denial, and so the matter stood. And how badly the boys needed sleep was shown by the way they dropped into it in less than a minute after they had stretched themselves on their blankets.

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If the bears were anywhere in that vicinity they did not put in an appearance at the camp, somewhat to the disappointment of the captain, whose finger was itching for the feel of the trigger.

The boys were sore and lame when they were aroused at dawn and after a hearty breakfast resumed their packs. But this wore away after the first half hour, and they moved along cheerily at as rapid a rate as the character of the ground permitted.

A new spur was given to their activity when before long they crossed a high ridge and saw Mount Katmai in the distance rearing its head toward the skies.

"Can we reach it to-day, do you think, Uncle Frank?" asked Don eagerly.

"To-morrow if we have luck," replied his uncle. "That is, we can get to the base of it. But if we do, we'll be so tired that it may not be possible to get to the top. That climb is a big job in itself, and we'd better tackle it the next morning when we're fresh. Remember that we're not traveling on a schedule. We've got all the time there is."

Their luck held, and before the next night the party had reached the base of the great mountain that had been the scene of one of the greatest cataclysms in the world. They gazed upon it with awe. Of all the teeming millions

of people on the globe, they were among the favored few to look upon it, and their hearts beat faster at the thought.

But they could not reach the top before darkness set in, and they had to defer their attempt until the following morning. Even then they might be hindered, for explorers had often been compelled to wait for days to ascend it because of the clouds and vapor that enshrouded it.

But fortune favored the Sturdy party. The day broke bright and beautiful, and as soon as the explorers had dispatched a hasty breakfast they started their climb. It was an arduous task, but all were so eager to reach their goal that they gave no thought to weariness.

At last they reached the topmost ridge, and with the utmost care worked their way to the edge of the crater and looked down.

A cry of astonishment and delight broke from their lips at the scene of indescribable grandeur spread out below them.

CHAPTER XV

A STUPENDOUS SPECTACLE

FAR below the explorers, so far that it made them dizzy even to guess the distance, lay a great lake in the heart of the crater, its waters shading from blue to green. At the further end the water was of a lighter hue and in a constant state of ebullition, as though it were boiling in a huge caldron.

Bright yellow spurs of sulphur on the far side added to the color scheme, which was completed by the white of snowfields that extended far down the inner slope.

From a thousand vents in the rocky sides poured jets of steam, whose whistling sounded like that of a host of locomotives.

"The melting-pot of Vulcan!" murmured the professor, staggered by the sight and sounds.

"Nothing like it on the surface of the globe!" declared the captain, who had been practically everywhere and seen everything and knew whereof he spoke.

"How far down is it to the surface of the lake?" asked Don in an awed voice.

"About three thousand seven hundred feet," replied Professor Bruce. "If that's a little difficult to grasp, put it this way. The Woolworth Building in New York is nearly eight hundred feet high. Suppose it could rest on the surface of the water, you could put it there and then pile up three more buildings of the same size on top of it and even then they wouldn't reach to where we are now. For good measure you could put Trinity Church on top of the pile, and even then there'd be a couple of hundred feet left to fill."

"Gee!" exclaimed Teddy, instinctively moving back a little from the edge. "It would be some fall."

"Yes," agreed the professor. "Though one would be dead, or at least unconscious, before he struck the water. Which would be just as well, for the hot water down there would strip the flesh from the bones about as quickly as vitriol."

The boys could scarcely repress a shudder.

"While we're talking about the size of the crater, get this in your mind," observed the captain. "You could strip New York City of every building there is in it, homes, churches, skyscrapers, all the way from the Battery to High Bridge, then go over to Brooklyn and take every building there, chuck the whole lot into this hole, and there'd be plenty of room left

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for another city or two. That's how big it is."

"And suppose, just as you got them in, the old volcano should erupt again and start shooting skyscrapers all over the landscape," grinned the irrepressible Teddy.

The ludicrous picture conjured up made them all laugh, and lessened the tension produced by the awesome spectacle.

But they could not tear themselves away from the crater's rim of their own accord, and it was only when a heavy fog began to form, shutting out the view, that they reluctantly began their descent.

They had more than five thousand feet to go before they reached the base, and before they had made half that distance the fog had thickened and wrapped itself about them so that each looked to the other like a spectral figure moving through the dusk.

"That camp will look mighty good when we get to it," remarked Teddy, as he plodded along. "And, oh, boy, what I'm going to do to that grub when I get a chance to tackle it! I'm as hungry as a wolf, and that's no merry jest, believe me!"

There was no reply from Don, and Teddy rattled on:

"I thought I'd seen something out there in the Sahara and in Egypt, but there wasn't anything that came up to that crater. Why, even

the Pyramids aren't in it! I tell you when it comes to turning out things, it takes old Nature to do it."

Still no answer came from Don.

"Say, what is this, a monologue?" exclaimed Teddy, a little peeved. "Have you lost your tongue all of a sudden? I guess that crater—"

He broke off short and stared about him in blank astonishment.

Don was not there!

"That's queer," muttered Teddy to himself. "He must have gone up ahead to say something to his uncles. Don, oh, Don!" he called.

At the sound of his voice Captain Sturdy and Professor Bruce halted abruptly.

"What is it?" the captain called back.

"Is Don there with you?" cried Teddy, this time with a decided quaver in his voice.

"No," replied the captain, in alarm. "I thought that he was with you."

"He was up to a minute ago," replied Teddy, by this time in a state of wild agitation. "Oh, what has happened to him? Could he have fallen over a cliff?"

The next moment all were shouting at the top of their voices:

"Don! Don! Where are you?"

Don heard their calls and tried desperately to respond. But he could not.

He had been moving along with the others

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when suddenly the earth had seemed to give way beneath him. The next instant he had fallen through a hole up to his armpits, and his startled cry had been choked by the ashes that filled his mouth and made him feel as though he were strangling.

For a moment he could not realize what had happened. Then his brain cleared and the knowledge of his plight came to him.

He had fallen through the roof of one of the treacherous snow arches that had been hollowed out by steam or hot water beneath. He could feel the wet snow beneath his feet while from his waist up he was surrounded by the deposit of ashes.

He was jarred by the shock, but at first he felt no special alarm. It seemed to him that it would be a comparatively easy matter to pull himself up and free himself.

But to his growing horror he found that the more he struggled the more quickly he sank. He could feel his feet going down in the soft snow and a moment later they were dangling free in space. They had completely broken through the crust!

The lack of a foothold robbed him of a purchase that would have helped him to fight his way out. All he had to depend on now were his arms, and by this time they were partly covered, so that he could not give them free play.

He tried to shout, but his mouth was so full of ashes that his voice could not rise above a whisper.

He beat desperately at the ashes that surrounded him, but they yielded beneath his touch. They might have been so many feathers for all the resistance they presented.

By this time he had sunk so much deeper that his left arm was put out of action. He fought desperately with his right, but to no purpose. All the time he could feel that he was steadily sinking.

Now a new torture came to him. He could feel that his feet were enveloped in steam, the heat of which constantly increased in intensity.

He thought of the numerous vents of superheated steam that he had seen issuing from the rock that lined the sides of the crater. Perhaps the boiling water from which one or more of them had come was flowing beneath him. Was he doomed to fall into that scalding caldron, to meet a fate at which imagination shuddered?

The thought stirred him to still more frantic endeavors, and with his one remaining hand he strove to avert that dreadful possibility.

But now he had sunk still lower and his arm lost its strength. He had fought a good fight but failed.

The ashes reached his throat. Steadily they

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mounted to his lips. He threw his head back as far as possible, to keep his nostrils free.

In the meantime his uncles and Teddy had been making frenzied efforts to find him. The captain had drawn flashlights from the kit he carried with him, and equipped with these all rushed here and there, shouting with all their might and throwing the beams in every direction. They were wild with grief and anxiety.

Their search had continued for some time without result when Teddy's flash fell upon a white object a little distance away.

He rushed toward it and the next moment his voice rose in a shout.

"It's Don's hand!" he shouted. "He's here! Oh, hurry, hurry!"

CHAPTER XVI

JUST IN TIME

TEDDY's shout brought Captain Sturdy and Professor Bruce rushing to his side.

"Where is he?"

"Here! Hurry!"

In a moment they had sensed what had happened. The next they were all down on their hands and knees and digging feverishly at the ash covering.

In a trice they freed Don's head from the enveloping ash and by their united efforts drew him forth from what had nearly proved his living tomb.

They brought him to more solid ground a little distance away, and set to work to bring him to consciousness. They cleared his mouth of ashes and forced water down his throat. Then they chafed his wrists and slapped his hands vigorously until to their delight he opened his eyes and looked about him.

"Thank God!" exclaimed the captain fervently, and the others echoed his sentiment.

"I hope he's all right," said Teddy.

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Don tried to speak, but his uncle Frank stopped him.

"Not now, my boy," he said. "Just lie quiet for a while until you get your strength back. You'll be all right in a little while. But you've had a time of it."

So Don lay quiescent and rested, thankful and happy in the knowledge that he had been snatched from the jaws of Death and was still in the land of the living.

His splendid vitality soon restored him to a condition almost normal, and very slowly, with the assistance of the others, he was able to continue the journey down the rest of the descent until they reached the camp at the base. Here he was at once put to bed with an injunction to "sleep around the clock and then some" if possible.

He was utterly exhausted by the terrible mental and physical strain to which he had been subjected, and it was not till noon of the following day that he opened his eyes.

"How are you feeling, my boy?" asked Professor Bruce anxiously, as they all hurried to his side.

"Somewhat disfigured but still in the ring," replied Don, with a smile.

"Good!" exclaimed his uncles in chorus, and the look on their faces showed their satisfaction.

"You can't keep a good man down," jubilated Teddy, as he laid his hand affectionately on Don's shoulder.

"And to prove it," continued Don with a grin, "I'm just about ready to clean out all the grub there is in the place."

That was good to hear, and the others saw to it that he had the best that the camp afforded. While he ate he told them, in response to their eager questions, his experience of the day before.

"It would have been all right," he said, "if I could only have called out. I heard you shouting to me, but though I tried my best I couldn't raise a peep. Talk about a nightmare! That wasn't in it with the way I felt."

"It was a very narrow escape," said the professor soberly. "A little more and you would have been smothered to death."

"Toward the last I was hoping that I would be," replied Don. "That would have been an easy death to die compared with being scalded. That steam gave me a foretaste of what it would be if I had once gone through. But all's well that ends well, and I want to forget it as soon as possible, though I suppose I'll live it over many times in dreams."

The party stayed at the camp all the rest of that day, which was employed by the professor in gathering specimens of the volcanic ash and

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making scientific observations at the base of the mountain. Don and Teddy strolled about, feasting their eyes and storing their memories with the countless curious things that abounded in the vicinity, the cliffs carved into grotesque shapes, the trees stripped of their bark by the wind-driven sand as neatly as though they had been sheared by a knife, the waterfalls that cascaded down the slopes in drops of hundreds of feet to bring up in sheets of silvery spray.

Once Don's foot struck against a huge rock, but instead of stubbing his toe, he was astonished to find that the rock rolled away from him.

Teddy's attention was fixed upon something else at the time, and Don stooped and put his hands under the rock. Ordinarily he would not have expected to budge it, as it seemed that it must weigh two or three hundred pounds, judging from its size. But it came up in his hands almost as though it were a rubber ball.

He rubbed his eyes. Was he bewitched? Had the awful experience of the day before affected his mind? Almost in panic, he hefted the huge mass again. This time he raised it above his head with perfect ease.

Then something the professor had told him while on board the *Margaret* came to him and relieved his mind. His eyes twinkled as he

looked at Teddy, who stood with his back toward him and had not seen this byplay.

"It's wonderful how strong I feel to-day, Brick," he remarked. "It seems to me I could lift anything. Whether it's the mountain air or the big dinner I've eaten, I feel like a regular Sandow. Why, I'll bet that I could lift that big rock there up in the air."

"Come out of your trance," jeered Teddy. "You're all wet. What are you trying to put over on me?"

"If you say much more, I'll prove it," declared Don.

"Don't make me laugh, my lips are chapped," mocked his comrade. "You couldn't budge it, let alone lift it."

With a nonchalant air, Don stooped down, lifted the huge rock, and held it high above his head.

Brick gave a startled gasp and his eyes stood out like moons.

"What—what—" he stuttered.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Don. "Look here."

He took one hand from beneath the rock, leaving it resting on the other. Then he tossed it up and caught it on the other hand.

If Teddy had been old and fat, he would have certainly had a stroke of apoplexy.

But his bewilderment reached its climax when

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Don got down on his back, put up his feet and placed the rock upon them and juggled it about like an acrobat in the circus.

By this time Teddy was beyond speech. His face was as red as his hair. He opened his mouth, but no sound came forth.

Don took the rock from his feet, stood up and bowed right and left to an imaginary audience.

Not wholly imaginary, either, for the captain had come up, and now burst into a roar of laughter.

"Had you going, did he, Teddy?" he said, as he clapped the lad on the shoulder. "I don't wonder. Go and pick up the rock yourself."

Teddy roused himself from his stupefaction and did as directed. This accomplished, the sheepish expression on his face, as he looked from one to the other, sent them into convulsions of laughter.

But Teddy was a good sport, and after the first moment of chagrin joined in their hilarity.

"I'm the goat, all right," he admitted. "I swallowed the bait, hook, line, and sinker. But even yet, I don't understand it."

"There's more air in it than stone," explained the captain. "It's like froth that has solidified. It came from the crater in liquid form blown full of gas and air, and when it hardened later on the gas and air still stayed in it. That's what makes it so light. If you threw

it into the water, I doubt if it would sink. This pumice is almost like a sponge."

"Or Swiss cheese where there's more holes than cheese," suggested Teddy, with a grin.

"Only that the air's not confined in the cheese to an extent to make it buoyant," corrected the captain, with a smile. "But now that you boys have had your fun, suppose you come to the tent and help me get the packs ready for tomorrow. We want to start at dawn for the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes."

This was inspiration enough, and the boys worked with a will, so that long before supper time everything was in readiness for the next stage of their trip.

The day broke clear and bright, and refreshed by their long rest the party made good time over the deeply gullied ash lands on their way to Katmai Pass. It was a hard steep climb, and all were pretty well winded by the time they reached the pass.

From then on they had to pick their way with exceeding care, for the floor of the pass was fissured with cracks, through which came puffs of steam.

"Baby volcanoes having a little eruption of their own," observed Don, as he deftly stepped around one of them.

"Let's hope the babies don't get the colic till after we get past them," remarked Teddy.

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“You might as well get used to them,” said the professor. “They’ll be your constant companions for many days to come.”

“Hold your eyes in, boys,” counseled the captain when they reached the top of the ridge, “for they’re going to see something now that is liable to make them pop out of your heads.”

This they almost did a moment later.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WONDER VALLEY

THE Sturdy party were looking upon one of the most astounding pictures ever seen by mortal man.

Far ahead of them, as far as the eye could reach, stretched a valley from which thousands of columns of vapor were issuing through vents in the floor and curling and twisting toward the skies.

Some were as dense as those rising from the chimneys of large factories. Others were mere shreds or wisps, yielding to the pressure of the wind, weaving and winding in all sorts of graceful and beautiful forms.

Some of the vents stood on the summits of gently sloping mounds that looked as though they had set out to be volcanoes and then had changed their intention. Others rose from craters whose rims surrounded deep depressions in the valley floor. But by far the greater number issued from cracks in the fissured surface.

“The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes!” ejaculated Don.

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"Looks more like ten million," put in Teddy quickly.

"Perhaps not so many as that," replied Professor Bruce, "though it is known that the figure of ten thousand is far too low."

"It is as though all the steam engines in the world were gathered here and letting off steam at the same time," commented Captain Sturdy. "There's nothing like it on this footstool."

Far off on the horizon was the blue outline of a mountain around which the valley curved.

"Even now you only see a part of the smokes," observed the professor. "That mountain cuts off the view. But the whole active area covers about fifty square miles. If all that steam could be harnessed it would do the work of the world."

They stood for a long time, filled with awe, unable to take their eyes from this stupendous natural phenomenon, until at last the captain shouldered his pack as a signal for the others to do the same.

"Now we'll go down into this caldron and see it at a little closer range," he remarked.

"I should think it would be hotter down there than it ever was in the Sahara," remarked Teddy.

"Strikes me that way too," assented Don. "Like living in a gigantic Turkish bath."

"Not so bad as that," said the captain, who

had overheard the conversation. "A lot of the heat is dissipated in the upper air. And if you find yourself getting too hot, you can always go and take a dive into a snowbank. There are plenty of those on the mountain slopes surrounding the valley."

"Sort of a steam-heated flat with a refrigerator back of the kitchen," suggested Teddy, with a grin.

"Yes," agreed the professor. "And with a cooking range thrown in. And in addition to that, a fireless cooker. Oh, we'll have all the comforts of home."

"I don't quite get that fireless cooker idea," said Brick, rumpling up his red hair in perplexity.

"You will," the professor assured him, and vouchsafed nothing more at the time.

From time to time their nostrils were assailed by fumes of sulphur and other odors to which they could give no name.

"I should think there might be danger from some of the gases coming from these— What is it that you call them?" Don appealed to his Uncle Amos.

"Fumaroles is what these vents in the ground are called," explained the professor. "Yes, some of the gases are poisonous, but you're in no great danger from them unless you get too close."

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"I should think the first men who came here would have been afraid to close their eyes at night for fear they'd never open them again," suggested Don.

"I guess they were," admitted Professor Bruce. "Though probably what they were most afraid of was a gas they couldn't smell and which is the more dangerous on that account—the deadly carbon monoxide. They knew there must be plenty of that about the fumaroles. But they had to take a chance, and experience has proved that the valley is safe as far as gas is concerned. So you can dismiss that from your calculations."

"That's one thing to the good," remarked Teddy.

Before long the party had descended to the floor of the valley. From then on their path had to be a tortuous one in order to avoid the hissing columns of steam that rose from the fumaroles.

They were hungry from their long tramp, and the captain's practiced eye cast about for the best place to pitch camp.

He soon found the place he wanted part way up a slope that commanded a magnificent view of the valley. There they put up their tent and unloaded their provisions.

In the rear of the tent was a snowbank that had been partly hollowed out by the steam so

that it formed a natural cave. This proved to be an ideal place to keep such of their provisions as might be in danger of spoiling.

"And now, boys," announced the captain, "we're going to have our first hot meal since we left the *Margaret*."

A howl of delight greeted the statement, and Teddy threw his cap into the air.

To his surprise it did not come down again!

A gust of wind wafted it over toward one of the fumaroles a few feet away. There it was caught by one of the columns of steam which juggled it up and down as balls are sometimes kept in motion by the steam from a fountain.

The look of blank surprise on Teddy's face was too much for Don, who fairly rocked with laughter, in which the captain and the professor could not help joining.

"Good-bye forever!" chortled Don. "Unless you want to climb up the column and pull it down, Brick?"

But such a drastic procedure was not necessary, for another gust of wind, as though reproving the prank of its predecessor, drove the cap out from the column and it fell to the ground, from which Teddy picked it up with alacrity. But the incident did not distract his attention from the subject of dinner.

"About that hot meal?" he suggested.

"Yes," said the captain, "I guess we're all

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tired of cold canned goods. So we'll have some fried bacon and baked beans and boiled vegetables, and as a dessert I'll make a cake."

"Yum-yum!" exclaimed Teddy, smacking his lips. "I'll fry the bacon. That's where I shine. Where's the pan?"

"Here it is," replied the captain, taking it from its pack. "But you'll have to have a longer handle than this or you'll blister your hands."

He took a stick about five feet long and with a few quick turns of a cord tied it securely to the handle.

"There you are," he said, consigning it to Teddy's hands after putting in the pan a half dozen slices of bacon. "Now let's see you do your task. There's your cookstove," he added, pointing to a fumarole about twenty feet distant.

Teddy approached the fumarole gingerly and extended the pan over the jet of superheated steam.

The next instant it was nearly jerked from his hands and the boy performed some frantic gyrations before he could get it under control.

"I guess Uncle Frank has put you up against a bucking broncho," laughed Don.

"Maybe. But it hasn't thrown me yet," muttered Teddy, as he took a firmer grasp on the pole.

This time he protruded it just over the edge of the hole, and, being forewarned of the force of the jet, was better prepared to resist its onslaught. As under this régime only part of the pan was thoroughly heated, he had to fry only a slice or two at a time, as soon as they were done relegating them to the cooler part of the pan and putting others in their places.

"Oh, I guess I'm poor!" he remarked complacently, as he watched the bacon sizzle and turn to a rich brown. "I'm some chef, if you ask me."

But a haughty spirit goes before a fall, and as he turned to grin at Don, he incautiously let the pan get right in the center of the jet, which just then took on redoubled violence.

Pif! Swish! And up in the air went the pan, the slices of bacon flying out in every direction.

Teddy made a wild grab and caught two of them as they came down, but dropped them instantly with a howl and danced around like a dervish, blowing on his hands.

"Some chef, if you ask me," laughed Don. "That's the first time, Brick, I ever knew you to let grub get away from you."

"Never mind," consoled the captain, "there's plenty more where they came from, and we'll charge this up to experience."

He replenished the supply, and this time

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Teddy saw to it that the bacon got to the table in good shape.

In the meantime, Don had been melting some snow and filtering the water that came from it for coffee. The professor put some canned beans and other vegetables in earthen pots and went to one of the fumaroles. Close to this he dug two holes a foot deep, put the pots in them, covered them tightly and then heaped the soil over them.

"So that's your fireless cooker!" exclaimed Teddy, who had watched the proceeding with great curiosity.

"Exactly," replied the professor. "In a few minutes they'll be as hot as you can eat them. With fresh vegetables it would of course need a longer time."

"How can you be sure they won't burn?" asked Teddy.

"Anything with moisture could stay there all day without burning," was the reply. "You could put them in in the morning and find them all right when you got back at night. You'll see to-night. We'll put in some oatmeal to simmer and take it out deliciously cooked to-morrow morning for breakfast. It's different with that cake the captain is making. He'll have to guess at the time, for if he leaves it too long it will burn, just as it would in an ordinary oven."

The cake was duly made and placed in the

earth, and the captain called them to dinner, thinking that by the time they had finished the more substantial part of the meal the cake would be ready for dessert.

The meal was not such as is set before the dwellers in palatial hotels, but no pampered favorite of fortune ever enjoyed a dinner more than the members of the party enjoyed this. As for the captain's cake, Teddy pronounced it a "whiz," and praise could go no further than that.

They had tramped such a distance since early morning that they decided to "call it a day," and the remainder of the afternoon was spent in resting on the mountain slope and feasting their eyes on the wonderful scene spread before them.

"The pity of it is," remarked Don, "that so few people can see it. Here is one of the most wonderful sights on earth, and only a few hundreds or a few thousands will ever get a glimpse of it."

"It is too bad," agreed the professor. "But probably the time will come when it will be viewed by hundreds of thousands, perhaps by millions. For the United States Government has now set the region apart as a national monument, which is practically a national park, and before long it may start the building of roads. With a good automobile road tourists could

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make the distance from the coast in a couple of hours. When that comes to pass, if it does, there will be a host of visitors swarming in here every season."

"Then too," put in the captain, "there are the moving pictures that have been taken by some of the scientific expeditions, and some of which are to be taken by the party we met on board the *Margaret*. They'll be shown eventually all over the world."

"But that will be nothing to the real thing," objected Teddy. "You might see a moving picture of a dinner, but there wouldn't be much nourishment in that if you were hungry."

"There's something in that," admitted the captain, with a laugh. "All we can say is that the pictures are better than nothing."

When the time came to make ready for the night, the captain prepared some oatmeal for breakfast and put it in one of the "stoves" that Nature had so generously provided.

A cool wind had sprung up and it looked as though blankets would be wanted. Each of the party spread one on the ground to serve as mattress, reserving a couple to put over him.

Don and Teddy, who had gone to their beds first, had expected to drop off to sleep at once, as they were very tired. But instead of that they had not been stretched out many minutes before they began to toss about restlessly.

"Doesn't it seem unusually warm to you, Brick?" asked Don, in an undertone.

"Hot as blazes," was the answer. "I feel as if I were sleeping on a stove just as they say the peasants do in Russia in winter."

"Let's move to another spot," suggested Don. "Perhaps that will be cooler."

They shifted, not once, but several times; but there was no perceptible change and the boys finally put all their blankets under them as a sort of fender against the heat of the earth. Then they made a determined effort and dropped off to sleep.

When they woke in the morning they felt as though they were in a vapor bath. Their night clothing and their blankets were drenched with steam, as though they had been wrung out from boiling water.

"It was the same with Amos and myself," remarked the captain, when they narrated their experience. "I suppose we'll have it that way every night we stay in the valley."

He dug a hole in the ground about six inches deep and placed a thermometer in it. In a few minutes it registered two hundred and twelve degrees, the boiling point of water.

"There's the answer," he said, as he showed the boys the instrument. "We'll just have to get used to it."

"Gee, how I'd have liked to have had ground

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like this to sleep on when I was at the North Pole!" exclaimed Don.

They were soon ready for breakfast, and the captain strolled down to the fumarole to get the pot of oatmeal.

When he got there he stood for a moment as though transfixed. Then he gave a shout that brought the others hurrying to his side.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDER

“WHAT is it, Frank?” asked Professor Bruce anxiously.

For answer Captain Sturdy pointed to the ground in front of him.

The others looked, and an exclamation of astonishment broke from their lips, not un-mixed with consternation.

The pot had been dug up and lay empty on the ground. The oatmeal was missing. It had been scraped out so completely that the pot looked as though it had been washed. And all about the hole were the footprints of an enormous bear.

“That’s what comes of not having set a guard,” said the captain self-reproachfully. “I didn’t think they’d venture down into this valley. He’s made off with our breakfast, and if a bear had any sleeve he’d be laughing in it at the way he’s put it over on us.”

“Ten to one he’s been nosing around among the other stores, too!” exclaimed Don suddenly.

At these words they all made a break for the

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cave in which their provisions had been stored. Here, too, there were clear signs of the bear's presence. A bag of flour had been torn open and a slab of bacon carried away. Luckily most of their supplies were in cans, and though these had been tossed around they were still intact.

"Thoughtless of him not to have brought a can-opener along," remarked Teddy in a low tone to Don, for he sensed that their elders were in no mood to care for joking.

"Well, he didn't get very much, and we got off better than we deserved," said Captain Sturdy after he had made a hurried inventory of the loss. "But he'll pay us back all he owes us in the form of bear steaks, and he'll do it before this day is over, if we have any luck."

"Then we're in for a bear hunt?" exclaimed Don, his eyes sparkling.

"Surest thing you know!" replied Captain Sturdy. "We'll just get a hurried breakfast with whatever we can rustle up, and then we'll be off. I want to follow the tracks while they are fresh."

All were keen for the adventure, even the professor feeling his sporting blood come to the surface, and in less than an hour their preparations were completed, their guns carefully looked to, and they were off, the captain leading the way.

At first the tracks were readily traceable. One thing they established at the start. The bear had had no companion.

They had to move cautiously on the ash-covered stretches for fear of breaking through the crust of some treacherous arch, such as had almost proved Don's undoing. As a compensation for this, the tracks were plainer in the soft ash.

They soon reached higher regions where the ground was harder and in many places interspersed with broad plateaus of rock. Here the trail at times was lost altogether. In such cases the party spread out in a wide line until a shout from one of them told that the tracks had been picked up.

Whenever they reached the crest of a ridge commanding a view of the country, all scanned the ground ahead, hoping to discover some trace of the huge lumbering figure that they knew was somewhere in front of them. But though the eyes of Don and the captain especially were as keen as those of hawks, they each time met with disappointment.

"That bear sure had a date to keep, judging by the way he's kept going," remarked Teddy, after some hours of the chase had passed without results.

"He'll never keep it," prophesied Don, tightening his grip on his rifle.

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But as time went on it seemed as though the boy's prophecy would be falsified.

"Do you think he knows we're chasing him?" asked Teddy after a while, panting from his exertions.

"He may," answered Don. "Not that his eyes are probably any sharper than ours. But the wind is towards him, and it may carry our scent. If it weren't for that, it certainly seems as though he would have stopped to rest before this."

They came to a river, the largest that they had yet seen in Alaska. It was about four hundred feet wide and extended for miles in both directions.

"Here's where we flivver!" exclaimed Teddy, in vexation. "The bear has the laugh on us after all. We haven't any boat and we can't swim it and carry our rifles at the same time. Then, too, the water's probably boiling hot."

"I don't know about that," said Don, whose blood was up and who was now more determined than ever. "If it wasn't too hot for the bear, it won't be too hot for us. And perhaps we can wade across."

"Maybe," agreed Teddy, a little doubtfully.

The bear's tracks led straight down to the brink of the river. That he had gone in seemed certain.

The captain stooped and put his hand in the water.

"It's cool enough," he said. "It's probably outside of the volcanic zone. As to its depth, we'll have to guess. At any rate, we'll try it. But first we'll stop for a little rest."

They stretched themselves out on the bank and relaxed their tired limbs while they munched some crackers and meat that had been brought along. After they had eaten, the captain looked at the sun, which was almost directly overhead.

"It's not yet one o'clock," he said. "We have time yet to overtake him. If we're tired, so is he. In we go."

He stepped into the water, followed by the others. It had just an agreeable warmth. Still there was the danger of coming across hidden hot springs or cavernous holes, and they felt their way step by step.

They were relieved to find it shallow. In most places it was not above their knees, though at times the water reached their waists. But the bottom was clinging and mushy and pulled at them as though to drag them down, and the nightmare experience had tired them all by the time they finally climbed out on the farther shore.

But their eyes brightened when they saw an extensive growth of woodland at a little distance.

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“Ten to one he’s there,” Captain Sturdy declared. “It’s about the first place he’s found to lie down in without being in the open. But we’ll have to skirt around and come in from another side, so that the wind will be toward us instead of toward him.”

With all the stealth at their command, they circled about until they reached a place that the captain thought suitable for entrance.

He, as leader, disposed the members of the party at intervals of about a hundred feet apart, far enough to enable them to cover considerable territory and yet to come quickly to each other’s help if necessary.

Once more all looked carefully to their rifles, and then, as silently as possible, moved into the gloom of the thick woods. Much depended on surprise, and they moved along as quietly as so many ghosts.

Don was picking his way through a specially crowded part of the forest when a savage growl made him jump.

He turned like a flash.

Not twenty feet away, the biggest bear he had ever seen crashed through a thicket and lurched toward him, his slavering jaws wide open, his malignant eyes glowing with rage!

CHAPTER XIX

IN DIRE PERIL

DON'S rifle leaped to his shoulder, but as he lifted it a projecting branch caught in the stock and wrenched it from his grasp, sending it clattering to the ground.

Don stooped to regain it, but even as he did so a quick glance at his charging adversary told him that he was too late. Before he could get the weapon and take aim his foe would be upon him.

He turned and ran for his life.

Then began a race, the memory of which stayed in Don's memory as long as he lived.

He was swift and agile, but the nature of the ground was against him. Roots of trees reached out to trip him up. Festoons hanging from the branches brushed against his face and blinded him. There were thickets that he had to skirt, while the bear with his ponderous bulk was able to crash through them.

He had no breath left with which to shout.

Behind him he could hear the padding feet of the monster and its savage growls. He dared

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not look back for fear that he might trip and fall if his eyes were diverted from the path. Let him once go down and his fate would be sealed.

His breath came in gasps and his lungs seemed bursting. He could tell that the brute was coming nearer. It knew the woods better than Don. And it had the advantage of seeing the movements of its intended prey.

Don knew that the bear could keep up the chase longer than he could sustain it. There could be but one end, if the race lasted long enough.

But his brain was working as fast as his legs. And it was his brain if anything that must save him.

Nearer and nearer came the bear until Don could feel the hot breath of his pursuer.

With a quick movement, Don swerved aside almost at right angles to the path he had been pursuing.

The sudden movement disconcerted the bear, and in the time it took him to check his speed and turn his ponderous body Don had gained considerable distance, doubling on his tracks and rushing back toward the spot where he had dropped his gun.

He caught the gleam of the metal barrel, stooped and grasped it, and turned to meet his foe.

The bear, that had been running on all fours,

reared itself on its hind legs, towering high above the boy's head and threw itself toward him.

Don's rifle cracked.

The monstrous bulk wavered for a moment, a look of vague surprise replaced the fury of the wicked eyes. Then the huge body came down with a crash like the falling of a tree.

Don jumped aside just in time to avoid the impact of the monster. As it was, one of the outstretched claws caught in his clothing and tore a great strip from it.

A quiver ran through the outstretched form and the bear stiffened out and lay still just as the other members of the party, summoned by the shot, came running to where Don stood.

There was an outcry of excited voices as they looked from the bear to its conqueror.

"So, you got him!" cried the captain exultantly. "Good work, my boy!"

"Whew, but he's a monster!" exclaimed Teddy.

"Are you hurt, Don?" asked the professor anxiously.

"Not as badly as the bear," gasped Don, so exhausted that he could barely speak.

"Did you come upon him when he was asleep?" asked the captain.

"Not so that you could notice!" replied Don. "He was very much awake when I first saw him."

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He saw me first, and he came for me like an express train. I tried to fire, but a branch pulled the rifle out of my hand. Then he chased me till I managed to get back to the gun again and pot him."

"It must have been quick as well as accurate shooting," commented the captain, as he looked for the place where the bullet entered. "Here it is, right through the heart."

"I knew I had to get him with that first shot or not at all," replied Don simply. "He was right on top of me, ready to grab, and I couldn't have run any farther."

Teddy looked at his chum in keen admiration.

"Gee, Don, you're all there!" he exclaimed. "You're all wool and a yard wide."

"Well, I'm glad anyway that I'm all in one piece," grinned Don.

"I'm proud of you, my boy," said Professor Bruce, throwing his arm over the lad's shoulder.

"You're a credit to the family name," declared Captain Sturdy warmly.

He took out his hunting knife and began to skin the monster. The others aided as well as they could under his direction and in a little while they were able to start on their journey back, carrying their trophy with them. In addition to the hide, head, and claws, they bore with them some of the choicest and juiciest

steaks from the bear's flanks, which promised to keep them in meat for many days to come.

"Guess we've got back our oatmeal with interest," laughed Teddy.

"Yes," returned Don. "It sure was an unlucky day for that bear when he came nosing around our camp."

They had a feast that night that a king might have envied. Fresh meat was a rarity in that region, and they made the most of it. All were in the highest spirits, the captain because he had an exceptionally fine specimen of what he had come to seek, Don because of his victory over the bear, while the others rejoiced that Don was still with them after his narrow escape.

True to his promise, the captain established a sentry guard that night, each taking turns in watching for a couple of hours, and declared that this would be the regular procedure as long as they stayed in the valley.

"This fellow's mate may come along," he said. "Or some others of his breed. No doubt the volcanic eruption drove all the animals away for a time, but now the memory of that has passed and they're coming back again. If we can get them right on the spot, it will save us a lot of traveling."

No other marauder came along that night however, or for several nights thereafter.

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The days passed busily and delightfully. They were spent by the members of the party in accordance with their respective tastes. The professor sought out his specimens in the ash and on the mountain sides, and before long had accumulated a rich collection. The captain went off on long hunting trips, and bagged not only another bear but other little-known species of animals and birds. Teddy and Don made long excursions through the valley and up the slopes, crossing huge gorges, exploring caverns, constantly coming across curious, fantastic and beautiful things, the like of which they had never before seen.

The coloring of the hills and valleys especially aroused their enthusiasm. It seemed that Nature, the great artist, had outdone herself in the riot of beautiful colors that met the eye at every turn.

There were pink and red incrustations interspersed with yellow and orange. There were long, branching, needle-like crystals of sulphur, sometimes forming a glittering yellow patch of miles in extent gleaming like a great jewel under the rays of the sun. Bright orange and deep blue formed color combinations that were as unusual as they were striking.

"All the colors of the rainbow!" exclaimed Don, as he came upon a vision that made him gasp.

"Yes, and then some," agreed Teddy, with conviction. "I'll bet, with all the shadings, I could pick out a hundred separate tints. It's the biggest and most gorgeous outdoor art gallery in the world."

Teddy's delight in all this was unqualified. Don's would have been also, if he'd been able to forget the anxiety that shadowed the home at Hillville. The situation there, caused by the unscrupulous schemes of Dwight Harrington, kept intruding itself like a specter at the feast.

It seemed almost wrong that he should be enjoying himself while his father was a prey to apprehension.

How were matters progressing? Had the rascally plot proved successful? He longed for a radio set that would have enabled him to keep in touch with events. He found himself counting the days that must elapse before he would find waiting for him at Vancouver messages from home that would enlighten him on the thing that was nearest to his heart.

Don frequently accompanied his Uncle Amos on his trips. These he enjoyed greatly, not only because of the novel sights that were constantly bursting on his view, but also because of his uncle's clear explanations of many things that would otherwise have remained a mystery.

One day Don and the professor had been threading their way among a cluster of fuma-

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roles at the far end of the valley when Don became conscious of a curious vibration of the ground beneath his feet. At the same time his ear caught a faint rumbling sound.

“Am I getting nervous or is this ground really shaking?” he asked his uncle, who had stopped to examine one of the hissing vents and test its temperature.

“What?” murmured the professor absent-mindedly, deeply engrossed in his work.

“Feels almost as though I were walking on the turf of a bog,” said Don. “Keeps going up and down. Don’t you hear that drumming sound? Seems as if— Look out! Look out, Uncle Amos!”

His voice rose to a scream.

But loud as it was, it was lost in the roar of a thunderous explosion.

Not thirty feet away the ground rose up in a huge mound, from the shattered top of which belched a column of steam and boiling water, filled with fragments of red hot mineral elements that gave it the aspect of a stream of fire.

“Run!” yelled Don, tugging at his uncle’s sleeve. “Run!”

The man and the boy turned and ran for their lives. Fear lent wings to their feet.

About them were falling scalding water and redhot metal particles that blistered where they touched.

Luckily the wind was in the other direction and carried the bulk of the geyser-like stream away from them. Had they been on the further side of the fumarole they might have been burned or scalded to death.

As it was, they had painful burns in a dozen places before they got outside the zone of danger.

When they had reached a safe distance they turned to view the fumarole that had suddenly been transformed to a miniature volcano.

It remained in action with unabated force for the space of ten minutes, and then gradually subsided.

"Just what has happened hundreds of times no doubt when no human eye has witnessed them," remarked the professor, as he wiped his perspiring face and looked about for his cap.

"Well, I hope the next time one throws a fit, I'll be a little farther away," said Don. "But, gee, Uncle Amos," he added, with a grin, "I never knew you were such a sprinter. You must have done a hundred yards in ten seconds flat."

"I guess I lost some dignity," returned his uncle, laughing. "But I can spare that a good deal better than I can my life."

Don and Teddy were returning in a leisurely fashion from a trip one afternoon a day or two after Don's and his uncle's rather fearsome experience when, as they rounded a curve in the

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mountain side and came in sight of their camp, Don, who was slightly in advance, uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What's eating you?" asked Teddy with more brevity than elegance.

"There are people at the camp!" answered Don.

"Well, what of it?" answered Teddy.
"Probably your uncles beat us home."

"No, there seem to be eight or ten at least."

"Is that so?" asked Teddy, his interest becoming less languid. "Perhaps some of that scientific party we met on the *Margaret* have come to pay us a visit."

"I hardly think so," said Don perplexedly, as he focused his keen eyes on the spot. "They don't look like that kind. Great Scott!" he exclaimed, "I can make one of them out. It's Joshki!"

CHAPTER XX

A TENSE MOMENT

TEDDY gave a start.

"Joshki!" he exclaimed incredulously. "Are you sure?"

"Sure as shooting," declared Don. "There's only one fellow I know with a gorilla body like that."

"Then he's kept his promise after all," muttered Teddy. "He said he'd come back. Wonder what he's after."

"Nothing good, you may be sure," declared Don. "Wherever that fellow is, you can look for mischief. But come along and we'll soon find out. It's lucky we have our guns with us."

The two boys hurried along until they were within two hundred feet of the camp. There was nothing to screen their movements, and a sudden agitation in the group of the invaders showed that they had been seen.

A figure that they now plainly saw to be that of Joshki detached itself from the others and came shuffling slowly toward them.

When about fifty feet separated him from

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the boys, Don motioned him to stop. The fellow hesitated and seemed at first as though he meant to disobey the injunction, but when he saw that the boys had rifles he halted.

"What are you doing here?" asked Don sharply.

"De country's free, ain't it?" sneered Joshki.

"Not to fellows like you that ought to be in jail," broke in Teddy hotly.

Don put a restraining hand on his friend's arm.

"Easy, Brick," he counseled.

He turned again to Joshki.

"The country may be free, but our camp is our own," he said. "You seem to have taken possession of it."

"Well, wot if I have?" growled Joshki. "There's grub there, an' me an' my fren's—" he waved his hands toward his rough-looking gang composed of worthless natives and a few sailors, derelicts like himself who had been drawn together by the gravitation of common rascality—"want it. An' what's more, we're goin' to get it. See?"

"I don't see anything of the kind," replied Don sternly. "If you and your gang think you're going to rob this camp you've got another thought coming."

"Who's goin' to stop us?" sneered Joshki truculently. "A couple of kids like you that

I could break over my knee? An' here's another ting. I'm goin' to smash yer faces fur wot you did to me on de ship. I told you I'd git even, an' now I'm goin' to do it."

By this time his gang had drawn nearer, and a grin spread over their evil faces as they heard the threat of their leader.

"I don't think you're going to do any face-smashing," said Don quietly.

"Wot's a-goin' to keep me from doin' it?" asked Joshki, with a touch of something like amusement.

"This," said Don, tapping his rifle.

Joshki threw back his head and laughed uproariously.

"Dem pop-guns!" he cried contemptuously, waving in the air a tin cup from which he had been drinking when they first saw him and which he had not yet discarded. "Listen to 'em, boys, listen to 'em! Why, dey're more likely to shoot demselves wit 'em dan anybody else. Dem guns! Wouldn't dat make you laugh? Why, if—"

Don's rifle cracked and the cup went spinning out of the fellow's hand.

There was an exclamation of fright and astonishment from the gang, and Joshki stood with his mouth wide open, as though he were turned to stone.

He tried to recover himself.

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"Dat was just chance," he snarled.

"Was it?" returned Don. "Keep your eye on that cup."

With a lightning-like motion he fired again at the cup now lying on the ground, and with a jump it went flying for some distance.

Joshki's face became ashen and his knees sagged beneath him.

"So much for the pop-gun," said Don. "I could have sent either one of those shots through your heart or your brain. Do you want me to prove it?"

"Don't shoot, boss!" begged the Russian abjectly. "I—I'm goin'. I'll get out an' never bodder you again. Don't shoot!"

"Get out then," commanded Don, "and get out quick. I'll give you one minute to get out of range. Quick now."

Joshki turned and took to his heels, following his companions, who were already in wild flight down the slope.

Don and Brick watched the retreating figures.

"Guess they won't trouble us again," said Teddy. "That dandy shooting of yours did the trick."

"Even if it was only a pop-gun," observed Don a little grimly. "Gee, but I'm glad that we had our rifles along! If we hadn't, we'd have had no chance at all with that gang of huskies."

"I notice that Joshki didn't care to take up your bet on that third shot," remarked Teddy.

"No, and I'm glad he didn't," replied Don. "Of course, I wouldn't have shot to kill, but I'd have taken him in the arm or leg, just enough to put him out of action. That would have probably put the rest of his gang on the run. But then we'd have had Joshki on our hands and would have had to take care of him till he got well, and there'd be no fun in that."

"It would have been one sweet job," agreed Teddy. "I'd just about as soon nurse a rattlesnake. Well, our handsome faces are still unsmashed, and that's some comfort."

The captain and the professor came in soon afterward and listened with the keenest interest to the story of what had taken place in their absence.

"You're as good a diplomat as you are a marksman, Don," commented the captain.

"Which is saying a great deal," added the professor.

"I'm glad that your object lesson prevented the necessity of bloodshed," went on Captain Sturdy. "It would have brought about an awkward situation if you'd had to wound or kill, even in self-defense. There would have been all sorts of legal questions and examinations that would have been a sorry ending to our trip. As it is, the lesson has probably been well

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learned, and they'll avoid our neighborhood as they would the plague."

On the second day after these happenings, the wanderings of Don and Teddy took them far afield. They found themselves in a wild section, considerably beyond the volcanic zone, where patches of woodland abounded.

Don shot a duck, and they built a fire and roasted it, finding it good eating despite a slight gamy flavor that neither of them had ever cared for. Then the two boys sprawled out on the ground to digest their meal, at peace with all the world, their rifles resting against a tree.

Teddy's eyes, roving about, discovered an opening in a mound near by.

"Wonder what that leads to," he murmured. "I'm going to take a look at it."

He strolled over to it and looked in. Then he entered. A minute later Don heard his voice:

"Come here, Don, and see what I've found. They're worth looking at."

With some curiosity, Don answered the call and entered the cave. At first he could discern nothing in the semi-darkness. Then he made out Teddy's figure bending down over two little furry balls.

"Over this way," called Teddy. "Aren't they the cunningest little rascals? Cubs of some kind."

Don bent over, took one look, and then straightened up.

“Bear cubs!” he exclaimed. “Quick! Let’s get out of here. The mother may come back—”

He stopped short. A huge bulk filled the entrance to the cave.

The mother bear was back!

CHAPTER XXI

AT CLOSE QUARTERS

FOR one awful moment the boys' hearts stood still.

They were trapped. The bear blocked the entrance. In another moment she would be on them. And their guns were outside!

Don looked about wildly for another exit. There was none. The back of the cave ended in a blank wall.

But in that frantic glance he caught sight of a narrow ledge at the side of the cave. Its breadth was little more than that of an ordinary window sill. It started near the bottom of the cave and ascended slopingly until at the roof, where it ended, it was about fifteen feet from the floor.

"Quick, Brick!" shouted Don, as he jumped on the narrow ledge and started to climb it, supporting himself as best he could against the wall of the cave.

Teddy was close on his heels.

It was like walking on a narrow ledge around

the face of an office building, with the exception that this was much more difficult because of the upward slant.

The bear had rushed forward with a snarl toward the intruders, but by the time she reached the foot of the ledge they were already beyond her reach. She fondled her babies for a moment, saw that they were uninjured, and then turned her undivided attention to the boys.

Their hearts beating like triphammers, the chums pursued their perilous climb until they could go no further. The slightest slip would have thrown them to the floor. As to what would have happened then, there was no question.

At the upper end the ledge broadened somewhat, and a depression in the wall enabled the boys to turn around and assume a half-sitting position. It was lucky that it was so, for their trembling legs felt as though they were going to give way at any moment.

They were panting and gasping and drenched with perspiration as they looked at the enemy raging below them.

"Do you think she can follow us?" asked Teddy.

"No," replied Don. "The ledge was barely wide enough for us, and she'd be sure to tumble off."

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"But she's going to try it, just the same!" exclaimed Teddy.

The enraged brute made an attempt to do so and repeated the effort until several failures showed her that it was impossible.

Then she ranged about below them, uttering hideous growls and trying to find some place in the wall that would give her a foothold so that she could climb to her enemies. She reared herself on her hind legs and struck out at them with her forepaws, the terrible claws extended to their utmost length. But each time her blows fell short by several feet, and at last she gave this up too.

"I guess she can't get up," muttered Teddy, in relief.

"And neither can we get down," replied Don. "So that makes it even."

"All she's got to do is to stay here until we starve to death," groaned Teddy.

"But she doesn't want to starve herself," said Don, attempting to extract what hope he could from their terrible situation. "She'll have to go out and hunt for food sooner or later."

"And leave her cubs with us?" snorted Teddy. "Not a chance! She can live on her own fat for any length of time, just as she does all winter. And, too, maybe her mate will be

along soon and take care of the grub question for her."

"He'll think there's plenty of grub in sight when he gets his eyes on us," prophesied Don. "But perhaps there isn't any Mister Bear. He may have been the one we shot the other day."

"If so, his mate will have a pretty good chance of getting revenge," was Teddy's mournful conjecture.

The mother bear had gone over and slumped down by the side of her babies. But while she nursed them, her red, angry eyes were always turned toward the boys and every little while she emitted a low growl that was full of menace.

The atmosphere of the cave was close and fetid and made the boys almost sick. They were tortured, too, by thirst, brought on by the heat and their great exertions.

"Oh, what a boob I was to come into this cave!" moaned Teddy. "Where was the fool-killer that he didn't come and swipe me with his club?"

"I was just as bad," asserted Don. "I followed you in and left my rifle outside. Oh, what would I give to have it in my hands just now!"

"If she'd only go to sleep we might drop

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down and rush for the rifles," suggested Teddy.

"There'll be no sleep for her while we're in the cave," was Don's rejoinder.

The hours dragged on, each one seeming as long as a day to the trapped boys. At every moment they expected to see the bear's mate enter the cave. At other times they listened intently for some sound to indicate that Don's uncles had come to their assistance.

But here again their hopes were slight. They had left no word as to where they were going. The ground was hard and their trail could not be followed. Don's uncles would feel no uneasiness about them until night came. Then they would set out in search of them, but it might be a week before they found the cave, if at all. And long before then the end might have come!

And such an end! The boys shuddered as they thought of it.

For perhaps three hours the bear lay watching the lads. Then she rose and began to pace the floor uneasily. At times she would go to the entrance and look out. Then she would come back, growl at them, and resume her restless pacing.

She had the invaders trapped. Her ursine intelligence taught her that. But they were beyond her reach.

Their presence disturbed her. They were a

menace to her babies. They limited her freedom of movement. They made her a prisoner in her own cave. She had them. But in a very real sense they also had her.

Finally she went over to the cubs, routed them out of their sleep, said something to them in the bear language, and stalked from the cave, the little sleepy furry creatures following in her wake.

The boys looked at each other, not daring to believe their eyes.

"What does it mean?" asked Brick, in amazement.

"I hardly dare think it means what I hope it does," replied Don. "But it seems to me that she's going to look for another home. This has been discovered, and she thinks it's no longer safe. But that's only my guess. Perhaps it's just a bait to tempt us to come down. She may be laying for us outside."

For a full half hour the boys waited, divided between hope and fear. Not a sound broke the silence.

"I'm going to take a chance," whispered Don at last.

"I'll go with you," said Teddy.

"No, you won't," replied Don. "If one's killed, there's no reason why the other should be."

"Nothing like that," said Teddy, with de-

cision. "We sink or swim together, Don, old boy."

There was no dissuading him, and Don had to acquiesce.

Silently the two lads made their way down the ledge until they reached the floor of the cave.

"On tiptoe now until we reach the entrance," warned Don. "Then a quick break for the rifles!"

CHAPTER XXII

A NIGHT OF HORROR

EVERY nerve was at the highest tension as Don and Teddy reached the mouth of the cave and braced themselves for the rush.

Don reached out and touched Brick's arm. "Now," he whispered.

Like arrows from a bow, the boys darted out and rushed for the tree near which they had left their guns. They snatched the rifles and turned to meet the foe.

But there was no foe!

About them spread the smiling landscape, serene and peaceful, without any sign of the monster who for those long hours had made them taste the bitterness of death.

The reaction was so great that it left the boys as limp as rags. They sank down on the ground, entirely bereft for a time of speech or motion.

"This blessed sunlight!" exclaimed Brick at last. "I never thought I was going to see it again."

"Same here," sighed Don, in relief almost too vast for words. "I guess I'm fed up with caves from this time on. That is, unless I have my rifle along."

"Speaking of rifles," said Teddy. "We have them now and might still have a chance to plug the bear."

"I suppose we could," mused Don. "She can't have got very far. If it was a male bear I wouldn't hesitate for a minute. But, somehow, those little fuzzy babies waddling along after her—well, I don't want to take their mother away from them."

"That's so," agreed Teddy. "Then, too, it was kind of sporty of the old girl to give us a chance."

"Oh, you needn't give her any credit for that," laughed Don. "She'd have gobbled us up in a minute if she could. But at any rate, she didn't, so I guess we'll call it quits. And now let's make a break for camp. It'll take some tall traveling to get there in time for supper."

"Let's go," agreed Teddy. "And maybe the old tent won't look good when we see it again, eh, what?"

They set off at a rapid pace, but it was after dark when they reached the camp, where they found the others waiting for them with considerable perturbation.

"I certainly am glad you've turned up," Don's Uncle Frank greeted them. "Amos and I were getting worried. We don't like to think of you out in this region after dark. What on earth has kept you?"

"Plenty," replied Don. "The main cause had the shape of a big bear that seemed to be so fond of our company that she couldn't bear to have us leave."

"Did you get her?" asked the captain, his sporting instinct asserting itself.

"No. But she came mighty near getting us," put in Brick. "We never had a closer call than we had this afternoon."

The captain and the professor agreed with Teddy when they had heard the full details of the boys' story.

"It was all our fault because we were foolish enough to go into a strange place like that without our rifles," declared Don.

"Yes," rejoined his Uncle Frank, "in doing that you violated the first rule of a hunter: Never go without your gun."

"What's the second rule, Frank?" asked the professor banteringly.

"Never go without your gun," answered the captain.

"And the third?" asked Don.

"Never go without your gun," was the repeated reply.

"That seems to be about the whole thing," laughed Brick.

"It comes pretty near being," replied the captain. "And now let's get through our supper, for there'll be some work to do afterward in strengthening this tent of ours. I think we're in for a blow, if you can judge from the way the wind is rising."

"I don't see how we can make it much stronger than it is already," said Don wonderingly.

His wonder was justified, for with the possibility of a gale in their thoughts they had fortified the tent against the assaults of the wind with a multiplicity of contrivances. They had made a frame of poles and braces that had been sunk deep into the ground beyond the apparent possibility of being uprooted. The covering consisted of double sheets of thick canvas. The frame was further strengthened by guy ropes that were buried deep in the ground, great boulders being placed over them to hold them down.

"Maybe we can't, but we're going to try," was the captain's answer to Don's last remark. "I'm going to wind a few hundred more feet of rope around the frame where it will do the most good and I'm going to hang a heavy tarpaulin on the windward side."

Even as he spoke there came a fierce gust of

wind that seemed as though it would rip the tent from its foundations.

"The 'woolies,' as they call the gales up here, are rising sure enough," said Professor Bruce, with a note of anxiety. "And they can sometimes put a Kansas cyclone to shame, if all I've heard is true."

All hurried through their supper and set to work. It was high time, for outside the tent the two men and the boys had all they could do to keep their feet. They wound the ropes and heaped more boulders upon the ground foundation of the guys. Then they gathered all the boxes of supplies and piled them on the windward side of the tent to act as a barrier if the canvas gave way.

There were alternate gusts and lulls for the first hour after they had completed their preparations.

"Guess we've been more scared than hurt," remarked Teddy, to whom some of this preparation had seemed superfluous and who was intensely anxious to roll himself between his blankets.

"It's no false alarm," declared Don. "Uncle Frank and Uncle Amos know what they're doing. They always—"

Just then the real gale struck them.

Up it came through the pass with a frightful roar that to the huddled boys seemed like the

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crack of doom. With a terrific noise of tearing, one side of the tent split from top to bottom.

Through the rent the wind dashed, upsetting boxes, turning all the rude furniture topsy-turvy and rolling the occupants of the tent over and over in the débris. They were knocked about in all directions until they were covered with bruises.

All scrambled to their feet as best they could, and, gathering up their blankets, sought to cover the rent in the canvas.

But they were met with a stinging shower of pumice that cut their skins like the lashes of whips. The air was full of the flying pumice, some like needle points, other pieces as big as hickory nuts, with sharp, jagged edges that left blood behind them.

Men and boys had donned their heavy goggles, which were the only things that kept them from being blinded. But they could not protect their faces, though they shielded them with their arms as best they could. Not even their clothing protected their bodies, for the razor-like pumice cut through the cloth and lacerated their flesh from head to feet. And half the time the goggles would not stay on in the wind.

That terrible pumice was everywhere. It forced its way down their necks. It filled their ears. It clogged their nostrils.

"Talk about the sands of the Sahara!" gasped Don. "This is ten times worse, believe me!"

"You've said a mouthful!" spluttered Teddy. "An'—and I've go—got a mouthful!" he added.

Doggedly, desperately, the explorers fought against the terrible gale, trying to save the tent. They were bleeding, sore, bewildered, and exhausted, but they fought on. If their one shelter went, it seemed that they would be literally scourged to death. It would be impossible to live in the open.

And now the heavens opened and the rain came down in torrents, in floods that seemed to have no limit. The gale dashed it through the rents in the canvas, drenching the occupants through and through, the wet pumice seeming to have an added power to rip and tear the flesh.

The wind dislodged the rocks that held the guy ropes down and the rain soon soaked the ground so as to weaken its holding power. One by one the poles snapped. One by one the ropes gave way. With each new victory the wind seemed to howl gleefully and with a fiendish delight in destruction.

Then with a mighty roar came the calamity they dreaded. The remaining supports all gave way at once. The sides of the tent were dashed together and the whole structure was lifted and

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dashed down again in a tangled sodden mass of ropes and poles and canvas on the four crouching figures beneath.

The captain staggered to his feet.

“To the cave!” he bellowed, so as to be heard above the roar of the tempest. “It’s our only hope! To the cave!”

CHAPTER XXIII

IN TERRIBLE PLIGHT

THE rest of the party scrambled up and tried to follow the captain. Even in the benumbed state of their senses, they had grasped his meaning. The cave was the nearest, in fact, the only, refuge they could hope to reach. Although it faced the wind, there would be shelter on three sides, and they might huddle down in its recesses, cover themselves up as best they could, and have a little respite from that torturing hail of pumice stones.

Captain Sturdy was in the lead with the professor close behind him. Don and Teddy had been more closely entangled in the mass of wreckage, and it had taken them longer to work themselves clear.

"This is the worst yet!" panted Don.

"You've said it!" responded Teddy, with a gasp.

They were bringing up the rear and had almost reached the cave. Teddy, in fact, was just on its threshold when a terrific blast caught Don, lifted him as easily as though he had been a chip, and sent him flying through the air.

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A cry of horror burst from Teddy's lips as he saw his comrade vanishing in the darkness. Without a moment's hesitation he rushed in the direction in which Don had been taken.

"I've got to save him somehow!" Teddy muttered to himself.

The sensations of Don as he felt himself thus carried through the air were the most terrible that he had ever experienced. He had faced bears and jaguars, anacondas and bandits. Again and again he had been in peril of his life. But all of these together had never so terrified him as this involuntary ride on the wings of the wind.

On other dangerous occasions he had at least had the relief of action. He could fight, shoot, chase or be chased. Now he was paralyzed by the appalling knowledge of his utter helplessness. He was the plaything of the gale, the sport of the elements.

How far would he be carried? Where would he fall? Over what precipice would he be dashed?

The question was answered a moment later when he came down on a pile of ash-covered snow, sprawling on hands and knees.

But this was not his final stopping place. The momentum with which he was moving kept him rolling over and over, turning somersaults,

until he finally found himself at rest on his back, covered with ash and mud, his face upturned to the sky, from which the rain was still coming in torrents.

He lay for a moment collecting his scattered senses. Then he tried to rise, scarcely daring to try his limbs for fear that they were broken. Though they were fearfully bruised and sore, he found, to his delight, that they responded to his will.

The night was as black as pitch, and he had no idea of the direction in which the cave lay, except that from the lay of the ground he could see that he was on a slope. From this he reasoned that he should climb rather than descend, for he remembered that he had been carried toward the valley.

But when he tried to move upward he found it was impossible. The wind drove him back and the hail of pumice cut into him intolerably. He could not face that wind. He must run before it. Somewhere he must find shelter. Those lashing whips of stone would soon batter him into unconsciousness.

Just then he heard Teddy's voice shouting wildly:

"Don! Don! Where are you? Can you hear me? Oh, Don!"

Don shouted in reply and worked his way as

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well as he could in the direction of the voice. In a moment Teddy's figure materialized out of the mist close by his chum's side.

Teddy's hand closed convulsively on his friend's arm.

"Oh, Don!" he said, "I thought I was never going to see you again. Tell me, are you all right?"

"No bones broken, but I feel as though I were cut to pieces with these pumice stones," replied Don. "But I was hoping that you were safe in the cave, Brick. Did the gale carry you away too?"

"No," replied Brick. "I saw you sailing off and I rushed after you."

"Just like you, old fellow," said Don, with emotion. "Trust you to stand by a pal. But now what are we going to do?"

"Can't we climb back?" asked Teddy.

"Wind won't let us," replied Don. "For every step we'd go that way, we'd be driven back three. We'll have to be like a ship scudding before the wind under bare poles."

"We'll have to cross the valley then," said Teddy. "Right through the fumaroles, and we won't be able to see them."

"I know it's mighty dangerous," responded Don, "but we'll have to feel our way the best we can and trust to luck for the rest. If we can make the mountain on the other side, we

may be able to find some cave or gully where we'll be out of the wind and escape this hail of stone. I'll go first and you keep close behind me."

It was a fearfully hazardous passage. Again and again Don's foot touched the edge of a fumarole and only a hasty drawing back prevented his falling in. Some of the vents had a heat eight times the boiling point of water, a heat that would have dissolved metals subjected to it. To step into them would have meant certain and hideous death.

Though death was hovering about them during that awful journey and though the wind at times drove them where it would without their having any power to direct their steps, the fortune that so frequently favors the brave was with the boys, and at last, with a gasp of infinite relief, they realized that they were out of the valley and climbing the slope of a mountain on the opposite side.

Their faces were so cut and slashed by the sharp flying pumice that again and again they had to dash aside the blood that was flowing into their eyes and blinding them. Their terrible exertions had brought them almost to the last gasp. They must find refuge soon or perish!

"Here's a path," panted Don, after they had got some distance up the slope, "that seems to

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wind around and may take us out of the wind."

With renewed hope the boys followed the bend in the path and were delighted to find that at last the mountain interposed itself between them and the wind.

"We're safe now," said Don.

Then he suddenly felt himself falling through space!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LAKE OF FIRE

STRAIGHT down went Don for twelve or fifteen feet. Then his heels struck solid ground and he went down on his back and slid for what seemed to him an endless distance, bringing up at last on a bit of level ground.

He had scarcely raised himself to a sitting position when Teddy bumped into him, a disheveled, wild-eyed Teddy, his clothing torn almost to rags.

Dazed, bewildered, terrified by this turn in the wheel of fate, the boys sat and stared at each other.

"Yes, I'm here too," murmured Teddy at last, conjuring up a pale ghost of his old smile. "You see you can't shake me. Though this time I didn't come of my own accord. I simply came. We must have both stepped off together."

"There must be a hoodoo following us this night," said Don. "Luckily we didn't break our necks when we came down. I suppose, though, there's time for that yet before we get through."

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"The queer thing here is that we can see each other," remarked Teddy, wiping the blood from his face with his handkerchief. "Not that either of us is much to look at," he added grimly.

"It is odd," agreed Don. "Let's see if we can find out where the light comes from."

The boys picked themselves up with difficulty and moved in the direction of the light. With every step it grew brighter. Then they reached a turn in the passage and an unearthly radiance burst upon them. They both stepped back, gasping.

The path ended a few feet in front of them. Two hundred feet below the brink was a lake of fire. Great billows of boiling lava tossed to and fro as though agitated by a storm. At times a fiery spray would be dashed up to a height of fifty feet, to fall back like a trail of scarlet jewels. Red waves dashed against the sides of the chasm, like surf beating upon the rocks.

It was gorgeous, glorious, unimaginably beautiful. The boys stood spellbound. They were looking upon something that had probably never before been seen by mortal eyes.

But magnificent as it was, it struck a chill to the hearts of Don and Teddy. This was intensified when a clap like thunder resounded through the crater, and the red waves were

lifted up as though by a subterranean explosion.

"Perhaps there's going to be an eruption," muttered Teddy.

"Oh, I guess not," replied Don. "All the same, I think it's time for us to be getting out of here."

"That is, if we can," murmured Teddy doubtfully.

The boys went back and began to climb the steep ascent which they had come down so abruptly. They had no way of estimating its length, as the black night that shrouded the top gave them no clue.

It was hard and painful work in their exhausted condition, but they were cheered by the knowledge that they were making progress. But when they thought they must be nearly at the top they were halted by a wall, perpendicular in most places and in some places even curving inward.

Don and Teddy looked at each other in dismay.

"No one but a fly could climb that!" exclaimed Teddy.

"That must be the place where we fell straight down before we struck," said Don. "It shows us, anyway, that we're near the top. Give me a back, and I'll see whether I can get my fingers on the edge."

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Brick did as directed, but it was of no avail. Then Don mounted on his chum's shoulders. Still he could not reach the top. By straining his eyes, he could see the brink about five feet above his outstretched fingers.

"Only five feet," he said bitterly. "But it might as well be five hundred."

They felt the wall. It was of solid rock. With chisel and hammer they might have dug out footfolds. But neither had any implements except his jackknife.

Despair laid its fingers on the boys' hearts. Unless help came to them they were buried alive.

Below them the claps like thunder now became more and more frequent. A strong smell of sulphur grew more pronounced with every moment. The heat became more noticeable, as though the surface of the lake of fire were rising higher.

Something out of the ordinary was brewing in that infernal caldron.

As the lads looked down the way up which they had come, they could see that the light was stronger than it had been. At first it had been orange. Now it was turning to red.

A cry of horror broke from both of them when they saw a thin red stream come into view, ebb back for a moment, then return in redoubled volume.

The lake of fire was rising! It must already have reached the brink of the precipice on which they had stood a little while before. The mountain was preparing for an eruption!

"I guess we can say good-bye to this world," muttered Teddy.

"It looks that way," came softly from Don.

Now the bottom of the passage was a lurid glare and the molten lava began to mount steadily toward them.

There was no escape! They were utterly helpless! They could not climb out!

Now the lava was halfway up the slope. It would soon be lapping about their feet!

"Don! Teddy! Are you there?"

They looked up, and in the light furnished by the burning lava saw the faces of Captain Sturdy and Professor Bruce bending over the brink.

"Yes! Yes!" they shouted. "Quick! Oh, be quick! The lava is climbing up to us!"

A stout rope came hurtling down.

"Grab this, one of you," cried the captain.

"You, Don," cried Teddy.

"No, you first," said Don.

He fairly grabbed his comrade's hands and fastened them on the rope.

"Haul away," Don cried, and the next minute Teddy was yanked up by the strong arms above.

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Down came the rope again, and Don in turn was pulled up and over the brink, to be hugged by his uncles, who had been frantic with grief when they discovered his absence and had been searching for the boys all through that epoch-making night.

The wind had now died down, and by the aid of the flashlights the captain and the professor had brought along, the party had no difficulty in threading its way through the fumaroles to the site of the wrecked camp.

Although all were almost at the limit of human endurance, there was no thought of sleep for the rest of that night.

"Only a fool tries to see a volcanic eruption close at hand," said the captain, "and unless all signs fail there's going to be one before morning. And by that time we'll be on the top of the highest hill in these parts, where we can view it without danger."

All worked fast and hard, packed up their belongings, and then took up their trek for the hill in question.

They had no more than fairly reached it when, with a roar that could have been heard for hundreds of miles, the volcano in which the boys had been so nearly entombed sent its streams of smoke and ashes, rocks and lava, high toward the skies.

"There goes the fiery lake!" exclaimed Don

with awe, as they watched the tremendous spectacle.

"Thank goodness that your uncles didn't come half an hour later," said Teddy, who for once had no inclination to jest.

For two days longer there were outbursts at short intervals, and then the belching volcano subsided.

"That makes a glorious climax to our trip," remarked Captain Sturdy. "And as Amos and I have got all and more than all that we came for and you boys have had enough excitement to last you for years, I think we'll get started for the coast. We can jog along easily and get there at just about the time the *Margaret* is scheduled to call for us."

The next day the party set out on their return trip, stopping on the crest of the ridge for one last long lingering look at the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes.

"Uncle Frank was right when he said that this was the most wonderful spot on the footstool," said Don to Brick, as they resumed their journey.

"There's nothing in the world that can hold a candle to it," declared Teddy.

They found the members of the Government scientific party assembled at the coast. All were in high spirits, as the results of their trip had surpassed their highest expectations. All

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would have much to tell when they got back home.

“By the way,” said Doctor Geikie to Professor Bruce, “do you remember that fellow, Joshki?”

Don and Teddy, who were standing near by, pricked up their ears.

CHAPTER XXV

A SCOUNDREL FOILED

"I REMEMBER the rascal," Professor Bruce replied to Doctor Geikie. "He tried to loot our camp, and my nephew drove him off at the point of his rifle."

"We had a somewhat similar experience," said Doctor Geikie. "The fellow had slipped away from the rest of the schooner crew, had gathered together a band of fellows of the same stripe, the scum of the ports together with a few worthless natives, and started out as a sort of bandit leader. He and his gang visited our camp while we were out exploring and got away with quite a lot of stores, as well as personal valuables."

"I hope the authorities round him up," said the professor.

"A higher authority has already done that," replied the doctor gravely.

"Do you mean he's dead?" asked the professor.

"Yes," answered Doctor Geikie. "One of our native assistants found the body. It lay at

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the foot of a high cliff, and there is every likelihood that he was blown from the cliff on the night of the big wind."

The pair moved on, and Don and Teddy looked at each other.

"Guess there's no need of further worry about Joshki getting even with us," observed Teddy.

"No," responded Don. "That score can be regarded as settled."

It was pleasant to meet again Captain Maitland and their other friends of the *Margaret*. The voyage back was free from the storms that had made the first trip memorable, and there were no more of the petty thefts that had produced so much unpleasant friction. Tolman, the radio operator, was an enthralled listener as the boys narrated the stirring adventures they had undergone since they had last seen him.

The boat stopped for a few hours at Vancouver, to take on cargo and passengers, and here the boys found a host of letters from home awaiting them. They were hungry for news, and they read the numerous epistles with a great deal of interest.

Some of the news from Hillville was good and some was bad. Don was relieved to learn that all his family, as well as the Turners, were in

good health. But he fumed aloud when he learned that Dwight Harrington was making more trouble than ever, and that Mr. Sturdy was greatly worried over the outlook. The legal turn that matters had taken were distinctly unfavorable, and Harrington and his tricky lawyers seemed to be weaving a maze that would be hard to unravel.

"That fellow, Harrington, is making my father's life miserable," said Don bitterly to Teddy. They were seated on the deck after the vessel had resumed her journey to San Francisco. "I wish I could give him the same dose that I gave Brock. He's the meanest, slipperiest crook in Hillville."

A passenger who had boarded the boat at Vancouver and who was seated near by looked up curiously.

"Excuse me, Buddy," he said. "But is the Harrington fellow you're talking about named Dwight?"

"Yes," answered Don, in some surprise. "His name is Dwight Harrington. Why? Do you know him?"

"Only too well, if he's the fellow I mean," replied their new acquaintance, whose name was Gorton. "A kind of stocky man with a wart on his nose, a loose mouth, a cast in one eye and a way of slapping people on the back

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so that they'll think he's a regular fellow."

"That's the man!" replied Don, now keenly interested.

"Got lots of money?" pursued Gorton, with added interest.

"Seems to have," agreed Don, "though nobody seems to know where he gets it."

Gorton laughed.

"I guess there's no mistake," he said. "That fits Dwight Harrington to a dot. You asked me if I know him. Yes, I do know him. He's stung me, as he has a lot of others, and I have some of the worthless stocks yet that he sold me. San Francisco got too hot to hold him, and he cleared out. Went East somewhere, and when you said Hillville I remembered that that was the place I heard he'd settled in. From what you said to your friend here, I gathered that he was making trouble for your father. Is that right?"

"Yes," replied Don, and briefly sketched the case of the disputed property.

"Same old Harrington!" said Gorton. "Crooked as a ram's horn. Here's a tip, Buddy, that may come in handy. I know how he's making his money. He let it out to an old pal of his, and it's come to me straight. Ever heard of bootlegging?"

"Sure," said Don. "Selling liquor. Breaking the law."

"That's it," replied Gorton. "Crooks are making heaps of money at it. There's a creek in Hillville, isn't there?"

"Yes," said Don. "It runs back into the country for miles."

"Ever hear of an old brown mill on that creek?"

"There's an old abandoned mill up near the head of it," said Don. "But no one ever goes there. It's overgrown with bushes, and it has a reputation of being haunted."

Gorton threw back his head and laughed long and loudly.

"That suits Harrington to the death," he chuckled. "There are spirits about the old mill all right, but they're the kind that come in bottles. Get me, Buddy?"

"You mean," cried Don excitedly, "that Harrington is using the old mill for bootlegging purposes?"

"Nothing else but," grinned Gorton. "If you want to see Dwight Harrington throw a fit, just say 'old brown mill' where he can hear you."

From that time on Don was in a fever of excitement. The moment he reached San Francisco he sent this telegram to his father:

"Don't make any arrangement with Harrington till I get home. Important."

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The journey across the continent was uneventful, but far too slow for Don. Teddy left them at New York, promising soon to run out to Hillville.

It was a rapturous greeting that Don received from all his family when he at last reached home. His mother cried over him. Ruth hugged him. Dan and Mrs. Roscoe welcomed him joyfully, and Jenny received him as one risen from the dead.

"Oh, Mister Don," she said, "I'm so glad you wasn't burned up by none of them bolcanic corruptions."

Fred and Emily Turner, too, were there, and gave him a welcome that warmed his heart.

As soon as the first ecstasies of reunion were over Don went into conference with his father. When the talk was finished Mr. Sturdy wore a happier visage than he had shown for months.

Richard Sturdy sent a brief note to Harrington the next morning, asking him to call that evening at the Sturdy home.

Harrington jumped at this as meaning surrender, and his oily face was wreathed with smiles of triumph when he came at the appointed hour, bringing Brock with him, the latter having asked to come along so that he might have the satisfaction of seeing his father "put one over" on the parent of the boy he hated.

They were shown into the library, where Mr.

Sturdy was awaiting them. Don, the professor, and the captain were also in the room.

Brock looked at Don with a gloating sneer on his face as Mr. Sturdy motioned the visitors to seats.

"I told you we'd get your old man," he whispered as he passed near Don.

Mr. Sturdy went at once to business.

"You seem to have me on the hip, Mr. Harrington, as far as legal quibbles are concerned," he said, "though you know you haven't a shadow of real right to the property."

"Law is law," grinned Harrington, rubbing his hands together unctuously.

"Well, let that go," said Mr. Sturdy. "What will you take to relinquish all your pretended claims?"

"Ah, now you're talking reason!" exclaimed Harrington exultantly, while Brock shot a vicious grin at Don. "But it will cost you a little more than it would have done if you had come to terms sooner. Then I was willing to settle for ten thousand dollars. Now it will cost you fifteen. You ought to have settled earlier, but you thought you'd win. Now the boot is on the other leg—"

"What's that about a bootlegger?" asked the captain innocently.

Harrington started violently.

"You misunderstood me, Captain Sturdy,"

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he said, recovering himself with a great effort. "I said the boot was on the other leg. I'll take fifteen thousand dollars to settle. We can sign the papers at my lawyer's office or at yours."

"Why not sign them at the old brown mill?" put in Don quietly.

Harrington jumped to his feet. His face turned as pale as death. He looked about him fearfully, as though he expected to see officers of the law standing beside him. He visioned exposure, disgrace, jail, ruin!

"Wh-wh-what did you say?" he stammered, putting his hand on the table to steady himself.

"The old brown mill," repeated Don. "The one on the creek, you know."

"Sit down, Mr. Harrington," said Mr. Sturdy. "You seem rather nervous to-night. As you were saying, you will take—"

He paused.

"I—I've kind of changed my mind," said Harrington, his hands trembling so that he could not control them. "You see, we're neighbors, and there's no use of any hard feelings, and—and so, suppose we let the matter drop."

"The dropping of the case is up to you," said Mr. Sturdy coolly. "But we'll cut out the neighborly element. You can state in writing, if you like, that you are convinced your claim is unfounded and that therefore you relinquish its further prosecution."

"I'll sign it," said Harrington, falling over himself with eagerness. "You can make out the paper right now."

The thought flashed through Don's mind that Brock's sickly, frightened face was a sight to see.

Mr. Sturdy drew up a brief statement and Harrington signed it, the professor subscribing his name as a witness.

"I won't detain you any longer, Mr. Harrington," said Mr. Sturdy.

The precious pair, father and son, took up their hats and slunk out of the house like whipped dogs.

"Hurrah!" cried the captain jubilantly. "That's one case where right triumphed over wrong."

"Those references to bootleggers and the old brown mill were flashes of inspiration," said Mr. Sturdy happily.

"One thing is certain," laughed Don, "and that is that the old brown mill will go out of business mighty quick. Honest, dad, aren't you glad now that you let me go to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes?"

"Very glad," answered Mr. Sturdy.

The old brown mill "went out of business" the next day. Dwight Harrington tried to escape but was captured in an effort to cart away some of his illicit liquor. He is now out on

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bail, awaiting to be tried for his crimes against the government. Brock left town and that was the last Don saw of him.

“Ready for more adventures, Don?” asked his Uncle Frank one day when the two were sorting out their specimens and oiling their firearms.

“Any time you say, Uncle Frank,” was Don’s quick reply.

THE END

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